







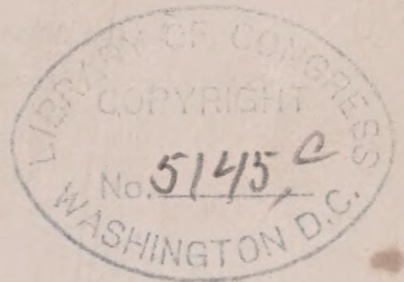
Kent Graham and Sam Cresly.

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CHINKS OF CLANNYFORD.

BY
KATE W. HAMILTON,

AUTHOR OF "SHADOW OF THE ROCK," "NORAH NEIL," ETC.



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“EVERY one must build,” said Kent, his thoughts going back to one of Aunt Gray’s twilight talks.

“Well, what are you building?” asked Louis, suddenly.

The question was unexpected, and Kent paused a moment to consider.

“Not much by myself, I believe,” he said, “only trying to help along a little in what others are doing—*filling up the chinks.*”

CHIRKS OF CLANNYFORD

It was no more than a few days ago that I was in the
vicinity of the town of Clannyford, in the suburbs of the busy town
where the noise of the streets and the hum of the
business in a broad, quiet, pleasant
place, the town of Clannyford, was a
beautiful scene. The town was a small town with
wide streets and a few houses, but it was a
town with a history and a name that was
famous in the history of the town and the
country. It was a town that was a
center of the town and the country.
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CHINKS OF CLANNYFORD.

CHAPTER I.

NUITE in the suburbs of the busy town, where the noise of its strife and toil came but faintly, in a broad, quiet, pleasant street, the June sunlight looked down upon a beautiful home. There was a stately house with wide lawn and grand, shadowy old trees ; a garden bright with flowers ; vases filled with trailing vines ; statues gleaming here and there, and a fountain flashing in the morning sunlight and flinging its glittering mist of spray far out on the soft green grass.

By the gate, where a broad carriage-drive opened out upon the highway, a boy some fourteen years of age was standing—or rather leaning against the high gate-post—his arms folded and his gaze wandering dreamily up and down the road. A frank, blithe, bright face, his looked, even under its veil

of thoughtfulness, like one whose abounding life and activity would scarcely allow him to remain long idle. The sound of feet on the graveled road suddenly ended his reverie. He turned quickly as a man approached leading a horse, and a little tone of impatience flashed into his voice as he called:

"Hurry up, Barney! I've been waiting this long time!"

"Shure, it's hurryin' I've been for the last half hour," responded Barney, composedly. "Here's Lio all ready for thtravelin', an' I'm hopin' he'll go well, for it's mesilf can tistify that he won't hould still well."

"Ah, Lio, my fine fellow! in good spirits, are you?" The boy stroked the animal's glossy neck caressingly. "We will be off, then."

"You'd beether be takin' up wid my counsel, Masther Kint, an' stay where ye are," said the man. "It'll rain long enough afore the day's over."

The sky looked as sunny and blue as the eyes which the boy lifted toward it. His glance swept the horizon, then rested in merry unbelief upon the face of his counselor.

"Oh, Barney, you are no prophet!"

"No profit, ain't I, thin? Shure, your father must be havin' a quare fancy for misfortunate bargains, an' him a-payin' me wages for this tin years, intirely!" responded Barney, with a humorous twinkle of the eyes that looked out from under his old straw hat.

Kent laughed.

"You are good at almost everything else, Barney, but you are a poor barometer."

Barney's ignorance this time was real instead of feigned. He scratched his head with a puzzled look, and at last admitted, though with evident reluctance:

"Barnometer? barnometer? I thought I knowed everything about a barn, but that's a thrifle I don't just rightly comprehind, it's throe for ye."

Just then a red face was thrust out of the open window of a little house near the gate, and a woman's voice called:

"Now, thin, jist ride where ye plaze, an' a good time to you, Masther Kint, darlint, an' don't be heedin' Barney's botherin'; it's himself as is always seein' signs of rain, an' spilin' a body's comfort wid his blatherin' storms. Shure, it's a fine day, intirely."

"So it is, Peggy." Kent was already mounted.

He laughed, touched Lio and sped out through the gateway and up the street, passing fine old residences and pretty cottages, until the houses began to grow more and more distant from each other, tastefully-ornamented grounds giving place to long sweeps of meadow and the quiet street merging into a still more quiet country road.

The boy rode more slowly when the city was fairly behind him. The green fields stretching away under the sunlight, and the narrow strips of woodland that occasionally threw cool shadows on his path and made the air fragrant with the breath of wild flowers, were in themselves a subtle temptation to loitering. Then, too, there was a thought busy in Kent Graham's heart that day that made him almost unconscious whether he were riding fast or slow—a vague unrest that had kept him dissatisfied and half impatient all the morning, and had had no little share in starting him forth on his trip. He could give the troublesome guest no name; he did not know what it was that he wanted or did not want, or was dissatisfied with. His vacation, looked forward to with boyish eagerness, had suddenly become a burden upon his hands; his plans of pleasure seemed not worth the carrying out.

“Nothing to do but amuse myself, and I can’t do that,” he murmured to himself, in a half amused, half vexed way, at last. “I suspect ‘myself’ isn’t quite big enough to fill myself, and I shall have to take in some extra stock. Any way, I’ll go out to Uncle Nathan’s and see what they are all about.”

He caught up the bridle he had been holding so loosely, and was starting forward at a more rapid pace, when a figure by the wayside caused him quickly to draw rein again. A short distance from the road ran a small stream, and near it, upon the trunk of a fallen tree, sat a boy larger and apparently two years older than Kent. His head was bent down, his chin supported by his hands, while his elbows rested upon his knees. His torn hat, drawn low over his eyes, revealed at the back a mass of thick black curls. His face was turned away from the road, and if he had heard any one approaching, he gave no token of such consciousness, until Kent, having scanned him for a moment, called questioningly :

“Sam ? Sam Cresly, is that you ?”

He partly turned then, and answered briefly and rather gruffly :

“Yes.”

"I haven't seen you this long time," Kent said, cordially, approaching him. "What are you doing here?" he added, a little curiously.

"Nothing but minding my own business," was the reply, in a tone that plainly indicated a wish that his questioner would engage in the same laudable occupation, and taking no notice whatever of the kindly greeting, he turned his head still farther away.

"What is the matter, Sam?" asked Kent, in an altered tone, after a moment's silence.

"It don't concern you what the matter is," said Sam, his impatience bursting all bounds at the question. "I want to be let alone, that's all! It's a free country—leastways, they say it is—and I've a right to sit here if I want to; it don't trouble you any, and the sooner you ride on, the better."

"Are you crazy, Sam Cresly?" demanded Kent, anger and astonishment struggling for the mastery. "What do you mean by talking to me in that style?"

In his indignant surprise he emphasized the little word "me" almost unconsciously, but Sam noticed it in an instant, and commented sneeringly:

"Talk to *you* that way! Oh yes; nobody

must say anything to *you* that you don't like! You are Kent Graham, and your father is rich and owns the mill. I'm nothing to nobody; you might go to old Crail and get me turned out of my place; you'd better do it!"

Kent's face flushed angrily. His was a generous nature, to which the very fact of possessing any power over another by which he could wound or injure was sufficient reason why that one, of all others, should be secure. So, though this imputation was hard to bear, there yet was that in it which curbed his resentment, and he only answered:

"I don't think I could do anything of the kind if I would, and I would not if I could; you know that as well as I do. If you want the whole brookside to yourself, you can have it; you are not civil enough to have anybody care to stay with you long."

Sam looked after him as he rode away, watching until he was out of sight.

"'Crazy to talk to him that way?' Well, s'pose I was," he muttered; "only made him mad, and didn't do me no good. But I don't care—no, I don't. What right had he, all dressed up and riding his fine horse, to ask me what's the matter?"

It's nothing to him. He has all he wants—money and friends and a good time; everybody notices him, and cares for him, and is glad to see him. He'd find what the matter was quick enough if he was like me—only a poor ragged feller that worked in the mill, and his father a—”

The boy paused suddenly and leaned his head down upon the old trunk with a quick breath that was half a sob.

Kent rode on rapidly, his lips compressed and his eyes flashing for a few moments, until his vexation seemed partly to have expended itself in his quick ride. Then he fell into a slower pace and calmer thought, but his brow grew more puzzled as the flush passed away from it. “That wasn't a bit like Sam Cresly! I do wonder what is the matter with him?” was the question that formed itself again and again, and to which he could find no answer. A beautiful tuft of violets, lifting their heads from their beds of moss, caught his eye, and suggested a new thought:

“How Aunt Gray would like those! I'll ride through Clannyford and take them to her; maybe she can tell me about Sam;” and dismounting, he soon possessed himself of the fragrant blossoms.

Clannyford—or Clanny's Ford, as the place had

been originally called—was on the river side, about two miles from the city. It was only a small village that had grown up around the “Graham Mills,” and its houses, with few exceptions, were occupied by those who were employed in the great manufactory, yet the beauty of its situation and its quiet loveliness attracted many an admiring glance from occasional visitors. Although Kent’s direct route did not lie through the village, it required no great digression to visit it, and leaving the main road, he turned his horse’s head in that direction. At one of the better class of houses, standing a little apart from the others and surrounded by a neat garden, he drew rein. A cozy little cottage it was, at whose door a kind, motherly face looked out before the boy had fairly dismounted.

“Ah, my boy, is it?” the old lady said, pleasantly.

“Yes, aunty.” Kent followed her into the house with the air of one familiar with the place, and seated himself upon a low chintz-covered lounge by the open window, while she brought fresh water and arranged his already drooping violets in a slender vase.

That room was very unlike any in Kent’s beauti-

ful home, yet his eyes always glanced about it admiringly—the home-made carpet covering the floor, the heavy old-fashioned arm-chairs, with their cushions of silken patchwork, the plain white curtains at the windows, and the hanging shelves, with their few books—and, indeed, could scarcely have offended older eyes and a more cultivated taste. The simple, cozy little nook suited well its occupant, with her gentle, quiet manner and her lovely face, for it was lovely, even though the hair that framed it was gray and time and sorrow had left their traces upon it.

“Aunt Gray,” as Kent called her, was a distant relative of his father’s, but from Robert Graham’s boyhood she had been to him, in all that best deserves the name of friendship, a near friend. She had been the tender, faithful nurse of his young wife during her long illness, and had stood beside her deathbed. He felt for her an almost filial respect and affection, and in her old age, widowed and childless, he would gladly have welcomed her to his own home, but she preferred to keep her quiet life unchanged in the little home made dear by many memories. Countless tokens told, however, that he did not forget her, and Kent was a frequent visitor—her boy, she fondly called him.

"Haden't you better take Lio over to Mr. Crail's stable?" she asked, after a few moments.

"Oh, I did not come to stay this time. I only saw those flowers in the wood, and thought I would bring them to you."

"Where are you going, then?"

"Out to Uncle Nathan's. I took a sudden fancy to do that this morning, because I didn't know anything better to do."

"Well, that is a very good thing in its way," smiling; "only I thought you had planned so many things for this vacation that you couldn't spend any of it out of town?"

"Yes," answered Kent, slowly, "but I tired of them all; they didn't seem worth carrying out, aunty," half laughing. "How can people make themselves happy?"

"I don't think they can," she said, quietly.

Kent looked up in surprise; he had not expected that answer.

"What can they do, then?"

"I do not know, unless they try to make others happy."

The color mounted suddenly to Kent's face. Did she think him selfish?

She saw the look and guessed its cause.

“I have heard physicians say, Kent, that people who are in the habit of constantly watching their own pulse are not very likely to have it beat regularly. I suspect the effect is very much the same if we are always keeping a finger upon our happiness to see how it ebbs and flows. It will live a longer, more healthful life if we do not watch it too closely.”

“I don’t do that,” he answered, quickly, as if her words had been an accusation. “I don’t think about it at all, generally, any more than I do whether I’m breathing or not; only just sometimes—I don’t know how or why—the life and pleasure seem to go out of everything. I don’t know what I want, and the things I have been caring about don’t seem worth much.”

“Perhaps they are not,” she answered, simply. Certainly she offered no remedy for the vague discontent and unrest he had brought there. Kent wondered a little that she said nothing more, and he was silent for a few minutes, gazing thoughtfully out of the window. Then recalling the errand upon which he had come, he turned toward her again :

“Aunty, is anything wrong with the Creslys?—with Sam?”

"I know of nothing unusual the matter with Sam. His father has been drinking worse than ever, and making them all a great deal of trouble."

"I wonder if that was all?" said the boy, musingly.

"*All?*" Mrs. Gray looked at him in astonishment, and he laughed.

"Oh, I don't mean to say that is not trouble enough for any family, aunty! I was thinking, though, that I didn't see why it should have made Sam so abominably uncivil this morning. I came across him a little way out of the village sitting alone by the brook. At first he would hardly speak to me at all, and when he did, he gave me to understand, in very plain English, that my room would be decidedly better than my company."

"Ah! Kent, my dear," said Mrs. Gray, shaking her head, with a smile, "if you find it hard to be happy with all that the world can give you, you might become even morose and uncivil, sometimes, with a home as wretched as Sam Cresly's, especially if you were often denied even that miserable shelter by the insane fury of a drunken father, notwithstanding that you worked hard day after day to bring into it such poor scraps of comfort as it possessed."

"That's a fact," said Kent, soberly. "Poor fellow!" He leaned his head on the window-sill, and tried, for a few moments, to imagine himself in Sam's place, and to fancy what he would have been like under such circumstances.

Mrs. Gray left the room, and went out to the little kitchen adjoining, looking back presently to say,

"Wait a few minutes, Kent; you must have some dinner before you go."

"Oh no, thank you, aunty; it isn't nearly dinner-time yet."

"But it will be long after it before you get to your uncle's; it is nearly sixteen miles, remember. How came you to go this way instead of by the railroad?"

"Just for the fun of it. I've been by the cars so many times, and I never went across the country but once; besides, I wanted to take Lio."

The old lady looked a little doubtful about the wisdom of the plan.

"What did your father say to it?" she asked.

The boy laughed.

"Just what he almost always does—'Do as you please about it; only take good care of yourself, and don't get into trouble.'"

The lady's smile ended in a sigh as she went back. Kent's life, tenderly shielded as it was, knew almost no control. The father was fond and proud of his bright, intelligent, high-spirited boy, and as long as he "pleased himself" and kept "out of trouble," he seemed satisfied, and required very little else. Was this self-pleasing, self-care and avoiding of trouble the highest aim that was ever to be set before him? Mrs. Gray wondered, as she moved about arranging plates and cups.

"I am making you trouble, Aunt Gray," Kent said, regretfully, as he watched her through the open door.

"Pleasant trouble, then, if there is such a thing. My boy does not come so often that I can afford to be inhospitable. Come, now, and eat your dinner."

Kent enjoyed the simple dinner with boyish zest, his ride and the quaint, old-fashioned china, which he greatly admired, aiding his appetite, perhaps. He did not know any other garden that raised such tender radishes and delicious strawberries. What splendid cream that was, too! and those biscuit! Some way, Phillis never made any that tasted like them. "Aunty," after the manner

of every good housewife everywhere, looked on and listened well pleased.

“Now I will not keep you any longer,” she said as he arose. “I shall not be surprised if we have rain before night, so don’t ride too slowly.”

“That is what Barney told me,” answered Kent as he mounted and waved a good-bye. “I’ll ride fast.” Still, as he glanced up at the sky, he fancied both cautions had been needless: he could discover no signs of a storm.

Out of the village and into the country road again he passed, and followed its windings over gentle hills and into valleys broken by rippling streams, the pleasant woods and green fields giving place now and then to a substantial farmhouse. Yet, despite the beauty of the landscape and his enjoyment of it, the boy began, after a time, to realize that his one trip across the country had not made him so familiar with the route as he had fancied, and he was obliged, where two roads met, to stop and consider which one to take. Two or three times he inquired at a house or of some chance passer-by, and once, on so doing, found himself quite out of the way and compelled to retrace his steps for more than a mile, so that altogether his progress was not very rapid. He

cared but little about that, however : he was in no hurry to reach his journey's end ; and, after all, the not knowing exactly where he was had a certain charm of novelty about it which he made the most of in his easy, careless way.

He had been thinking of Sam Cresly and his hard, cheerless life, and almost forgetting what was around him, when he suddenly became conscious that the bright sunshine had vanished, and looking up, he saw that the clouds were gathering thickly over the sky so clear a few hours before.

“Doubly warned, yet I shall be caught in the rain at last if I am not careful ! It is just about like you, Kent Graham, to keep your eyes staring at a bit of blue sky before you, and never look to see what is behind you,” he said. “We are a pretty couple, Lio, and we had better travel fast if we want to save ourselves a wetting.”

Lio offered no objection to the suggestion, and started forward at a quicker pace. But the summer storm gathered fast, and Kent, glancing upward again as he entered a wood, saw that the whole sky was overcast. He urged his horse forward still more rapidly as a low, muttering peal of thunder fell upon his ears. Still darker and darker it grew, the great shadowy trees add-

ing to the gloom, and the thunder grew nearer and louder. On, on, went horse and rider, the young traveler watching anxiously to see the wood growing lighter and the trees farther apart, that he might know he was coming into the open country again and hope to reach some farmhouse. He looked in vain. The forest grew thicker, more dense about him, and darker, save as vivid flashes of lightning began to light it. Still he pressed forward for another mile, though with a growing conviction that he had mistaken the road. At last the heavy drops began to fall around him. He had surely lost his way; that forest he never had passed through. Where should he find shelter? Under the tall trees he did not dare to pause; the lightning was becoming so intense as to render them unsafe, even if they could have furnished secure protection from the rain. Suddenly a small clearing opened before him, and within it stood a tiny hut. The boy paused for no second glance or thought, but rode to it, dismounted and knocked hurriedly at the door.

A woman, dark and tall, bearing in her tawny face and erect form some resemblance to both gypsy and Indian, answered the summons, and to his brief explanation and request replied by a bewil-

dered stare, then, after a moment's hesitation, threw the door wide open to admit him. Kent glanced at his horse. What could he do for poor Lio? Some long boards were placed on end against one side of the house—if the place could be so called—forming a kind of shed. He pointed to it:

“Can I put my horse there?”

The woman nodded assent, and in a moment more the animal was led under its shelter, while his master sought that of the hut, none too soon to avoid the drenching rain that came pouring down. Shaking the water from his hat, and brushing it as well as he could from his clothing, the boy accepted the upturned tub toward which the woman pointed him as a seat, and surveyed the situation. A low, rudely-built hut of rough boards, with only the ground for a floor, two windows, or rather places for windows, for while one contained a single sash in which panes of glass and holes were equally divided, the other was only a square aperture, with no pretence of ever having been anything else. For furniture, the place contained the tub on which he sat, a large iron kettle that stood in one corner, a chair without any back and a long bench. At one end of the building was an oddly-fashioned fireplace of stones plastered up with

clay ; at the opposite end three or four boards had been laid down, and over them, in a confused mass, was scattered a quantity of straw, rags and old garments—bed and clothes-press in one.

A girl of fifteen or sixteen years, lighter complexioned than the woman who had appeared at the door, and with long light hair almost the color of the dirty faded dress she wore hanging about her shoulders, sat upon the bench. A quantity of willow was scattered around her, some of which she was weaving into a basket. The broken chair was occupied by an old woman—very, very old she seemed to Kent, with her dark, wrinkled face looking out from a mat of rough gray hair. Her feet were bare, as were those of the other two, and her dress consisted of a skirt of bright flannel, with a piece of an old bed-quilt pinned about her shoulders. She raised her bleared eyes toward the boy when he first entered, but after that did not seem to notice him. The girl glanced at him with a kind of stupid curiosity now and then, but no one spoke to him.

He thought the three were the only occupants of the room at first, but presently there was a rustling in the corner, and out from among the rags and straw a little head was pushed, and a

pair of large black eyes were fixed in solemn astonishment upon Kent's face. For about two minutes the head was all that was visible; then the child, a boy five or six years old, began slowly to creep out from his covering, and at last stood upon his feet, never once turning his gaze from the visitor. There was another pause, another long look, and then he slowly crept up step by step until he was within reach, when, stretching out his hand, he touched Kent's sleeve cautiously, as though he were some strange animal with which it might not be quite safe to meddle. Finding that no harm ensued, he repeated the experiment, and then growing bolder, he walked around the young stranger, viewing him curiously on every side.

Kent could not help in some measure returning the compliment with a feeling of blended pity and amusement. The dark-faced, black-eyed little fellow presented a singular figure, clad as he was in garments that had originally belonged to some one twice his size, and that had known no other alteration than a simple cutting off of the superfluous length.

"Will you tell me what your name is?" asked Kent, at length, anxious to divert the child from

his occupation of examining his jacket buttons with his little dirty brown fingers.

The black eyes searched his face for an instant, as if suspicious that some evil intention lurked under the question, and their owner withdrew a step or two before he answered :

“Dan.”

“And whose boy are you?” pursued Kent, pleasantly, for the sound of a voice made that gloomy place seem a little more like a human habitation.

“Hey?” said the child, wonderingly.

“Won’t you tell me who your father is?”

The perplexed look deepened on Dan’s face.

“Father? What’s father? If ye mean Joe, he’s dead, an’ if ye mean Pipe, he’s scooted off. Mean Pipe?”

“No,” answered Kent, bewildered in his turn.

“What’s father?” said Dan, again. “I never seen none.”

“Scoot, Dan! Clear away, I tell ye!” interposed the tall woman suddenly, though without looking up from her basket-weaving. Dan retreated to his corner, and the young traveler was once more left in silence.

He glanced anxiously out of the window; it

was still raining violently. He looked at his watch; it was already after four. He began to wish himself well out of the adventure. Another hour dragged slowly by. The vivid lightning had passed away and the thunder had subsided into an occasional low and distant peal, but the rain still fell heavily and showed no signs of abating. The boy began to dread being obliged to remain all night in his strange and uncomfortable quarters. He would far rather have braved the storm if he had known in which direction to ride, but he did not. Once he appealed to the girl:

“Do you know the road to Stafford?”

“Dunno. Sime does.”

“Where is Sime?” asked Kent, eagerly.

“Dunno; ’ll come after while.”

He could gain nothing more, and there was left for him only to exercise what patience he could.

After a time the door was thrown open, and there entered a large, rough-looking man bringing several pieces of fresh meat. He was followed by a boy considerably larger and older than Kent who carried a bag slung over his shoulder. Each deposited his burden, and then turned a questioning look upon the stranger.

"Got mazed in the timber, an' driv' in out the rain," explained the tall woman, briefly.

The man muttered something in reply that Kent did not understand, and the boy turned toward him with a kind of grin.

"Do you know the road to Stafford?" questioned Kent, desperately.

"Yaas."

"Could I find the way to-night, do you think?"

"Dunno; it'll be dark."

"If you could show me the way—" Kent began. The boy shrugged his shoulders.

"Yaas, arter it's done raining," he answered, turning away; his attention seeming to be fully absorbed in the movements of the woman, who, partly filling the large kettle with water, cut some of the meat into it and hung it over the fire. That done, she opened the bag which the boy had brought in, displaying to view a strange medley of broken bits of bread, cold biscuit, potatoes and fragments of meat. She selected some potatoes and some pieces of bread and threw them into the kettle, then tying the rest up in the bag, deposited it in one corner of the room.

Kent did not doubt that the pieces were the fruits of a begging excursion, and felt pretty sure

among what people he had fallen—an idle, miserable tribe who had been for a long time the denizens of that wood, living by begging, basket-making, and it was strongly suspected by stealing also. He had heard of them often. Yauncees, the country people called them, though it was not known how the name originated, and they were supposed to be a branch of the gypsy tribe. Kent's position was extremely unpleasant, but he could see no remedy. It was fast growing dark, and there was nothing for him to do but resign himself to the thought of remaining where he was until morning.

When the simple cooking was completed, the woman lifted the kettle from the fire and placed it upon the ground, and then there was a general rush toward it, each one armed with a kind of spoon or ladle. Even the old woman seemed to awaken to something like interest then, and made her way toward it with the rest. They contented themselves with using their spoons as long as the stew remained too hot for anything else, but as it grew cooler, fingers performed good service in fishing out choice bits. There was no invitation extended to Kent, and, indeed, he was far from wishing that there should be, though he congratulated himself upon the thought of that early dinner which

Aunt Gray's kindness had provided, and which at the time he had thought so unnecessary.

The night settled down drearily, and presently the inmates of the hut began throwing themselves down to sleep among the rags and straw, leaving their guest to dispose of himself as he best could. He could scarcely complain, however, as they treated him with quite as much attention as they bestowed upon each other. For some time he kept his seat, but wearying at last of the one position, he took possession of the long bench, that had been vacated, and stretched himself upon it. There was for him but little sleep that night. The hard bed and strange surroundings would have made him wakeful, even if he had been free from anxiety and fear, which he was not. He was not naturally timid, yet stories that he had heard and read came up unbidden to trouble him with their suggestions. He thought uneasily of his horse and watch, and the temptation they might prove to those about him, and wondered vaguely, if anything should happen to him there in that lonely wood, how long it would be before his friends would know of his situation. His father would think him safe at his uncle's; it would be days before he would grow so anxious as to write or send for him. At

his uncle's they did not even know that he had left home. None who loved him knew where he was—no one but God.

Kent's silent prayer that night was more earnest than it sometimes was—not so broken with wandering thoughts as in his pleasant room at home. The shutting away of earthly friends made the One seem nearer; the distance and weakness of human aid revealed more clearly the omnipotent Arm that upheld his life, the God in whose hand his breath was, and whose were all his ways.



CHAPTER II.

IT was a long, long night, but the morning came at last, and the boy, awakening from a light slumber into which he had at length fallen, gladly welcomed the first gray dawn.

As soon as it was light enough he stole quietly out to look for Lio, and found him safely fastened where he had left him, but looking up with a low whinnying that seemed to ask what he had done to deserve so poor a lodging and no supper. Kent stroked and caressed him, as if he had indeed been some lost treasure recovered, and the horse in return rubbed his cold nose against his master's face. Then the boy went out to the roadside and looked about him in every direction, but his hurried ride through the storm had completely bewildered him; he did not know where he was, and could not decide in what way to go.

The people were all astir when he returned to the hut, and he at once applied to Sime for his promised services as guide, but that personage only shrugged his shoulders, and cast an affec-

tionate glance toward the pot that was once more swung over the fire. Kent at once comprehended the uselessness of expecting him to leave the place while there was a prospect of anything to eat. The rain had ceased, though it was still cloudy, and preferring Lio's companionship to that of his entertainers, he went out again, and walked back and forth before the open door, while within the scene of the previous evening was repeated. After a time Sime came to the door, wiping his mouth with the back of his hand. The old woman followed him with tottering steps, and as she stood a moment steadying herself by the rude doorpost, her eyes fell upon the young stranger, and drawing an old pipe from under her blanket quilt, she pushed it toward him and asked in mumbling tones for "baccar."

Such a forlorn picture of old age she looked that Kent, moved by a sudden impulse more pitying than wise, dropped a piece of silver into her hand. Whatever else she did not know or had forgotten, the love of money still lingered, and she clutched her trembling fingers eagerly over the coin with a kind of low chuckle. The imprudence of the gift was immediately made manifest, for the girl's bony hand was at once stretched out

for a like donation, and little Dan, with a large piece of meat still in one hand, rushed forward, and extending the other poor greasy little paw, repeated in singing tones the story he had been taught :

“Please gimme some money? We’re all poor, an’ hain’t had nothin’ to eat sence yisterday mornin’.”

However effective the plea might be in begging away from home, it was scarcely available under present circumstances, and, after one glance at him, Kent’s peal of laughter rang through the place.

In an instant a blow beside the head sent the child reeling and crying to a corner, and the dark woman who had administered it turned to Kent with a manner she tried to make bland and persuasive :

“Ye’ll please gin a poor woman suthin? Hain’t got nothin’ to live on on’y what’s give us. Ye’ll gin me a little money fer the child?”

Kent, indignant at the treatment Dan had received, did not comply very willingly, but, dependent as he was upon their assistance to guide him out of the woods, he did not know how to refuse, so he gave her a piece of money, not as

large as she had hoped for, however, as her lowering brow and sudden turning away betrayed.

"Will you show me the way now?" asked Kent, turning to Sime.

"Yaas," responded Sime, languidly, and Kent, heartily glad to start, led out his horse, and mounting, passed out into the road, but there Sime paused and leaned composedly back against a tree.

"What 'll ye gimme to show ye the road?" he demanded.

Kent looked his disgust, but he felt the helplessness of his position. He had just three half dollars in his pocket, and after a moment's thought he said:

"I will give you a half dollar."

"Waal," drawled Sime, "gimme it, an' I'll show ye."

Kent handed him the money, and he started down the road, though at a gait so leisurely that it was rather trying to the young horseman. On through the trees they passed, and it seemed to the boy that in almost every place where a road branching off made it possible Sime turned. After almost an hour of this kind of traveling, he remarked:

"This is not the way I came."

"No; this un's the t'other way," said Sime.

"It seems to me that you are leading me a great way round," added Kent, suspiciously.

"Yaas; it's the way round," responded Sime, serenely.

There was nothing to do but follow him, and Kent rode on, congratulating himself when they were fairly out of the wood. At last, where four roads met, Sime paused, and to his companion's impatient "Why don't you go on?" replied:

"What 'll ye gimme to show ye the rest of the way?"

"I have paid you already," answered Kent, indignantly.

"'Tain't nuff," drawled the rapacious guide.

"If I ever do find my way out, I'll feel like sending the police after you!" exclaimed Kent, forgetting possibilities in his sudden anger.

"'Ud ye come yerself an' show 'em the way?" queried Sime.

Kent bit his lip in vexation and turned his eyes in every direction, but there was no house visible. Sime had selected a favorable spot for his purpose, and now coolly watched his victim's survey of the premises; when it was concluded, he put in his proposition:

"Gimme 'nother half, an' I'll show ye the rest of the road."

Kent was strongly inclined to leave him and try to find the way alone, but the probability of his taking a wrong direction was at least equal to that of his finding the right one, and he was beginning to feel too tired and hungry willingly to run any risk of wandering far out of his direct course; moreover, the cloudy sky still threatened rain. So, after a few moments' consideration, during which Sime waited with indolent patience, he said:

"Go on, then."

"Ye'll gimme the half?"

"Yes."

The dark hand was reached up to take it, but Kent had gained wisdom by experience.

"You must show me the way first; I'll not trust you again."

"Ye'll have to gimme the sil'er first," persisted Sime, refusing to stir.

"No, I'll not," answered Kent, decisively. "If you don't choose to show me first, and take your pay afterward, you won't get it at all. You have got one half dollar for leading me wandering about through the woods, and I don't mean you shall

have another until I'm sure that I'm fairly on the Stafford road."

Sime threw himself sullenly down at the foot of a large tree, and began breaking a bit of dry stick in pieces.

"Well," said Kent, impatiently, "if you do not mean to go, I will do the best I can without you;" and he rode slowly off.

Sime's desire for the money was strong. After his trickery he was somewhat afraid that he should not get any more even if he guided the boy right, but perceiving that he was certain to lose it by remaining where he was, he called out:

"Say!"

Kent looked around.

"Will ye gimme t'other half certain sure if I show ye?"

"Yes; I told you I would."

"Waal, that's the wrong road; it's this un;" and getting upon his feet, he started on again, and Kent followed.

In half an hour they came out upon a smooth, straight road, which, indeed, might have been reached long before and in half the distance but for his purposely misleading, and then Sime said,

"This 'ere's the way. Jes keep straight ahead."

Kent was inclined to believe him, but still he thought it just as well to have some additional evidence of being in the right way, and he made no reply.

"Gimme the money now."

"Not until we come to a house or meet some persons, so that I can ask and find out whether you are telling the truth or not."

"I ain't a-goin' no further," protested Sime, beginning to lag.

"Stay where you are, then," answered Kent, riding steadily forward, and Sime, not willing to lose sight of the pocket that carried the half dollar, trudged along after him.

It was but a few minutes, however, before they came in sight of a house, and in a field by the roadside a man was at work.

"How far is it to Stafford?" Kent asked.

"Well, we calculate it's about six miles," answered the man, looking up.

"Can you tell me the way?"

The man came to the fence and rested his hand upon the rail.

"Keep straight on for about two miles; you'll come to a guide-board then."

Kent turned away with thanks, and Sime again came up and stretched out his ever-ready hand.

“Ye ain’t a-goin’ to cheat me now, be ye?”

Kent gave him the promised money, thoroughly glad to dispense with his company, and rode on alone.

The six miles were soon traveled, but not before it had commenced raining again, and it was in a dripping condition that the young traveler at last passed through the familiar gate and rode up to his uncle’s house.

“Kent Graham! on horseback, and in such a storm as this!” exclaimed his aunt, in astonishment. “Where did you come from?”

“Really, Aunt Hetty, I don’t know,” he answered, comically—“that is, if you mean where I came from last. I started from home originally.”

“In an original way, too, I should think! Here, Jasper, take his horse to the stable, and, Lewis, go with your cousin up stairs, and get him some dry clothes to put on. Some of yours will do, I guess; at least they will do better than the wet ones. What a looking object you are, child!”

Kent followed his cousin, but paused at the door to look back, and say, laughingly, with the air of a mendicant,

“Oh, Aunt Hetty, I haven’t had nothin’ to eat since yesterday mornin’.”

“I’m ever so glad to see you, old fellow!” said Lewis, affectionately, as he led the way to his room, “but what did possess you to start such a day as this? and how came Lio with you?”

“I didn’t start such a day as this: I left home yesterday morning; and Lio is with me because I have ridden him all the way.”

“Left home yesterday? came all the way on horseback?” repeated Lewis, in astonishment that increased at Kent’s explanation, until, in his interest, he forgot to add jacket or stockings to the other articles of apparel he had furnished, and Kent, equally forgetful, sat on the side of the bed in his shirt sleeves and bare feet, and talked on until Mrs. Mead called from the foot of the stairs,

“Come, come, boys! Kent is too long in getting off that wet clothing; he will take cold, I am afraid. He must come down stairs, and I will make him a good cup of boneset.”

“Boneset! ugh!” exclaimed Lewis, in disgust and commiseration. “You put on your jacket, Kent—oh, I forgot! I didn’t give you one; here it is—and I’ll go down and tell mother that you really haven’t had anything to eat since yesterday

morning. I guess she will give you coffee and some breakfast instead of boneset."

Mrs. Mead had great faith in herbs, however, and insisted that the tea should be swallowed first. Kent submitted, though with some wry faces, consoled by the warm breakfast that followed.

The whole story of his journey had to be repeated when his uncle came in to dinner.

"A regular nest of Yauncees! It's just like them!" said Mr. Mead, smiling at Kent's description of the hut.

"Where do you suppose they got all that fresh meat, uncle?" Kent asked, returning to a matter that had excited his wonder at the time. "I should hardly think that any one would have given them so much."

Mr. Mead shook his head doubtfully.

"I do not know how they got it. I know that oftentimes the farmers' cows that wander off into the woods never come back, and that persons traveling through there have come across skeletons and piles of bones. Many suspect that there is considerable butchering done without any buying of cattle. Still, we do not know that these people do it, so it is only fair to give them the benefit of the doubt."

"I say, Kent, it's sort of exciting—almost as good as an account of hunters or Indians!" exclaimed Lewis, whose love of adventure was sometimes a source of anxiety to his father and mother. "I'd like to go out there some day just for the fun of the thing."

"You wouldn't need to stay more than one night to have the romance taken out of the affair," laughed his cousin. "I didn't fancy it at all. The accommodations were anything but comfortable, and then," coloring a little, as if his boyish pride was half ashamed of the admission, "I was not quite sure that my watch and horse might not tempt them to do me some harm."

"Not much danger of that," his uncle replied. "The most of them are too cowardly and lazy to attempt anything desperate, even if they were otherwise disposed to do so. They content themselves with petty stealing, grand begging and a little selling of willow baskets—the tribe, that is; I don't know anything about your particular family."

"What a wretched life!" said Mrs. Mead, thoughtfully. "Poor little Dan! I am sorry for him—sorry for them all, indeed."

"I suspect Kent didn't feel very sorry for Sime after the way he acted," said Lewis, laughing.

"And yet," answered his father, with a grave smile, "something very like Sime's performance is repeated every day in business circles, and people who pretend to be far above the poor Yauncey call it only *shrewdness*."

Dinner over, the boys gathered in the kitchen, the large, old-fashioned, country kitchen, with its yellow-painted floor, its white, well-scoured table and rows of shining tins. Outside, the rain still fell steadily, plashing against the glass, forming little pools on the worn doorstep, and almost hiding with its misty veil the old barn and carriage-house. Lewis, at the window, looked in vain for any sign of fair weather. The smoke beat resolutely downward, the forlorn group of poultry in the woodhouse door oiled their feathers most perseveringly, and the stately chanticleer who paraded back and forth before them crowed in his rainiest tones.

"Thicker and faster, harder and more of it! Kent, I give it up!" said Lewis, turning away.

"Give what up?" asked the round-armed 'Tildy, who was vigorously washing out her dish towels.

"The weather," answered Jasper.

"I didn't know as he'd ever been takin' care of it," said 'Tildy.

"Oh, not the weather, but my prophecy about it, I mean," exclaimed Lewis. "I thought it would clear up this afternoon."

"Well, I don't know whether the weather is goin' to clear up or not, but I am," responded 'Tildy, giving a final snap to her towels and hanging them on their appointed nails by the chimney—"that is, if you boys will keep out of the kitchen long enough to give me a chance."

Lewis laughed.

"Let us go up to the attic," said Jasper, throwing his arm over Kent's shoulder; "nobody ever follows us there with soap and scrubbing-brushes."

"Dear a me, what a clatter!" soliloquized 'Tildy as she heard them passing over the polished oak floor of the wide hall and up the stairs. "'Twas most too bad to turn 'em out of the kitchen, but there don't seem no place pertic'larly intended for boys in the house, nor out of doors, neither, for that matter."

Mrs. Mead overheard the words with a smile that motherly anxiety changed into something like a sigh as she murmured to herself, "Ah, 'Tildy, I hope there are good, useful, honorable places in the world for my boys, and Kent too, dear fellow!"

Certainly, if that old farmhouse attic was not

“particularly intended for boys,” they had contrived to suit it to their purposes remarkably well. A wonderful place it was, with its walls decorated by bunches of dried roots and herbs, and its oddly-assorted furniture of chests, boxes, disabled chairs, crippled tables, old books and an antiquated spinning-wheel. Hither the boys were permitted to bear the treasures collected in their explorations by land and water, and carry on as best pleased them their many and varied experiments. It had always been the favorite resort of rainy days—a kingdom undisputed. Grand castles and fortresses had been built with those old books in the days gone by. Then, when such pleasures had been outgrown, one corner of the great room had been turned into a museum, where, upon shelves, not constructed by a master hand, indeed, but which the boys regarded with complacent satisfaction, were arranged the shells, curious stones, petrifications and general oddities that they had gathered up.

Lately, however, a workshop had been established in the opposite corner, and that, just now, was the chief attraction. Kent must be introduced to it, of course, and they spent no little time in talking over the miniature wheels, pulleys

and cranks, whose use any one save the boy-inventors would have found it hard to discover.

“Oh, I’d like to think out something great and useful, to be an inventor, wouldn’t you?” said Jasper, leaning his elbows upon the old chest before him and resting his chin upon his hands.

“I’d like to be *something*,” answered Kent, earnestly, a sober look stealing over his face.

“A soldier, for instance. Here comes a cannon-ball now!” exclaimed Lewis, catching up a pillow from a box of bedclothing near him and throwing it at his cousin’s head. The compliment was speedily returned, and a brisk contest ensued, the pillows flying in every direction and the conversation ending in a general frolic.

The shouts of laughter attracted Vernie from the room below, and her sunny face and curly head appeared at the door just as Kent had thrown himself down with his head upon one of the spent cannon-balls, laughingly declaring himself out of breath.

“What are you doing?” she questioned, after a brief survey of the battle-field.

“I am resting on my laurels,” said Kent.

“I think you are resting on one of mother’s pillows,” responded the matter-of-fact Vernie,

“and I don’t know what she would think if she should see them tossed about in that way.”

“Oh, she wouldn’t care for those old things!” said Jasper. “They make first-rate ammunition for a small army.”

“Oh, you are an army, are you?” asked Vernie, comically. “Which of you was the cavalry?” pointing to a well-worn saddle that hung over an old chest.

Kent sat up, laughing.

“We used to consider that a capital horse, didn’t we, Lew? The old fellow looks as fresh as ever.”

“I’m going to see what he has been feeding on all this time. I shouldn’t wonder if he had eaten up that gold lace that I was looking for the other day,” said Vernie, and kneeling beside the old chest, she threw open the lid and began looking over its contents.

“Here’s a fancy slipper for you, and here’s a pair of knee-buckles!” she continued, drawing out one article after another. “Oh, do look at this queer old bonnet! What a picture any one must have made with such a looking thing as this on her head!”

Presently she lifted up a bundle of yellow old papers, and turned them over curiously.

"I wonder what they are?" she said; "they look as if they might be sermons."

"Prosy old stuff, I suppose," said her cousin, placing his pillow upon the box beside him and leaning his head upon it.

But Vernie, after a moment's closer examination, exclaimed reprovingly, "Oh, Kent, for shame! They are sermons, and I do believe they are Uncle George's."

"Who is Uncle George?" asked Kent.

"Why, don't you know—" began Vernie, and then suddenly checked herself with a half compassionate, "Oh, I forgot!" and proceeded to explain. "He was our uncle, father's brother, your mother's brother, and he was a minister, but he did not live very long; he was young when he died. Mother told me about him, and she said he did a great deal of good while he lived. I'd like to have heard him preach," said the little girl, looking over the sermons almost reverently. "Here is one with the text, 'Ye are God's husbandry. Ye are God's building,' and here is another, 'Thine eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.' I wonder if it is so *very* far off?" said Vernie, dreamily.

"Lewis! Jasper! I want you," called Mrs.

Mead from the hall below, and the boys ran down in obedience to the summons. Vernie was engrossed in her researches, and the old attic was quiet. Kent lay still and closed his eyes, listening to the voices that were whispering in his heart, the thoughts his cousin's words had awakened.

He too wondered whether that unseen land where dwelt the King in his beauty was indeed very far off. It seemed so sometimes, and yet it was so near as to be pressing upon him on every side, reminding him of its existence at every turn, and in such unexpected ways and times, just as in these old sermons written long ago by the uncle he had never seen. His mother's brother! Kent remembered his mother. He was eight years old when his mother died, and every minute detail of that solemn hour was distinctly impressed upon his memory. Even now, to his closed eyes, the picture came back vividly. He saw again the darkened room, the sweet, pale face, the dimming eyes. He heard again the low voice in its last prayer for the beloved, for friends, husband, and then for her child, whose little trembling hand clung to hers; "This, my boy, my precious, only one, draw him to thyself, I pray thee, not after long years of sin, and wrong, and wandering, but

early, O my Saviour, that he may work for thee, anywhere, everywhere, work for thee his life long, and come home at last bringing his sheaves with him."

Tears gathered under Kent's closed lids as he remembered, and when Vernie, thinking he had fallen asleep, stole softly from the room, he was glad to be alone.

"Work for Jesus anywhere, everywhere." No, he had never done anything at all for him. He had always meant, when he thought of his mother, to be a Christian some time, yet he had lived on, often gayly forgetful, sometimes with a vague discontent and unrest, but seeking only his own pleasure still. A longing for something nobler and better awoke in his heart—had been growing there, indeed, longer than he knew—and its low whisperings grew into a clearer voice now. There was so much work to do in the world, this strange world holding so much of poverty, wretchedness and sorrow in it. It seemed to him that he had thought more of that in the last two days than ever before. However like a pleasant dream life might be to him, it was hard, bitter reality to many around him. And he was doing nothing—nothing for God and his fellow-men. Well,

it was not much that he could do now, but he was not even trying to do anything—not living the life to which his mother had consecrated him, doing nothing for that Saviour's sake who had died that he might live, and through whose name alone he might ever enter the gates of that land.

Kent thought long and deeply that afternoon, and when at last his thoughts formed themselves into prayer, it was very earnest in its briefness, very sincere in its resolve: "O Lord, who hast given thy life for me, help me to give my life for thee! Make me what my mother prayed for, what thou wouldst have me to be."

Doubtless a sainted mother rejoiced in heaven that day over an answered prayer, over the new life begun in that old attic room.

Lewis' entrance broke the stillness.

"Well, old fellow, are you awake yet?"

Kent raised his head, smiling.

"I haven't been asleep."

"Haven't! Why didn't you come down, then? Vernie thought you had fallen asleep, tired out after last night, and mother told us to let you rest for a while. Well, come down now; it is clearing up splendidly."

"Come to the portico," called Vernie from the

hall door as they went down stairs. "Come and look at the beautiful rainbow!"

"I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant between me and the earth," repeated Farmer Mead, with the quiet earnestness of one to whom such words and memories come naturally and lovingly.



CHAPTER III.

THE summer sun, coming up hot and bright, shone in at the open windows of a little house on the outskirts of Clannyford. There was scarcely air enough to move the limp, dingy white curtain which had been drawn partly back from the window. It was a morning to make one feel languid and uncomfortable at best, and the atmosphere of the small kitchen, with its heated stove, seemed almost stifling to the weary woman who moved about in it, now bending over the fire to stir the corn-meal into the kettle of boiling water, now spreading the table for the morning meal, and glancing longingly toward the window, occasionally, as if to catch the breath of cool air that did not come. Presently she opened the door into a little bedroom adjoining, and called:

“Susie! Teddy! come, get up now. It’s most time for Sam to come from the mill, and I called you a good while ago, too.”

There was another bed in the room, but she did not try to arouse its occupant—a man who was

sleeping heavily. She only directed the children's attention toward him by a warning glance, and then withdrew, closing the door after her. She went to the open doorway of the kitchen and sat down upon the low steps, wiping the perspiration from her face with the dark apron she wore, and leaning her head wearily against the door-frame.

A sad face hers was, tired and worn, with a hopeless look about it that was saddest of all. Her hair, carelessly brushed if at all, was drawn plainly back from her forehead, and her dress was considerably soiled as well as faded. Neither was the room which she had left in the best order that even its rude furnishing would allow.

Perhaps perfect order and neatness among the very poor are found oftener in story-books than out of them. At least, it must require considerable strength of mind and a brave heart to avoid growing careless and neglectful of many things while the daily struggle with care and poverty goes on and the burden of toil presses heavily. Mrs. Cresly was neither brave nor strong. Always far more willing to yield to the judgment of others than to trust her own, dependent and affectionate, she would have made a pleasant home for a loving husband. But she was ill fitted for such a life as

hers. The step that should have been firm beside her own grew into a drunken stagger, and the arm she had thought would be strong to lean upon was oftentimes worse than useless, and she could not be to her children father and mother both--could not be to them even the mother she might have been had they really had a father. They were scarcely "brought up," so far as her guidance and control were concerned; they were allowed to "come up." She did what she could toward feeding and clothing them, but her brain was not fertile in expedients and her heart had grown hopeless. Her more fortunate neighbors pitied her, but many blamed while they pitied, adding to their compassionate "Poor creature!" the qualifying comment, "Dreadful shiftless!"

She looked tired and forlorn enough that sultry morning to make any one long to lighten her sad lot. The boy who came up the dusty road and in at the little gate thought so as he looked at her face, and unconsciously his voice took a softer tone than usual as he spoke:

"Well, mother?"

"The breakfast's all ready, Sammy," she said, quickly, as if to excuse herself for sitting down. "I only came out 'cause it was so hot in there."

"Sit still, then," answered Sam; "I can help myself, I s'pose."

She arose and followed him in, however. It was far from being an inviting breakfast-table to which the boy came. There was no cloth spread over the pine boards, and the few dishes were of various colors and patterns, and many of them much the worse for wear. A small plate of butter, reduced to an almost melting condition, stood in the centre of the table, a half loaf of dark-looking bread lay near it, and there was a cup of molasses from which some flies had already attempted to breakfast, and in which they were at present stuck fast. The dish of "mush," or "hasty pudding," completed the bill of fare. Sam glanced at it, and sat down in silence.

The children came into the room, and, in obedience to their elder brother's rather gruff suggestion, washed their faces before they hurried to the table. Sam glanced at the door of the adjoining room and then at his mother. At length he asked,

"Asleep yet?"

"Yes. 'Tain't likely he'll wake up till 'most noon."

"I hope not," he answered, bitterly; "there'll

be a little chance of peace as long as he isn't awake."

"Sammy," said the mother, timidly, after a moment or two of silence, "have you any money left? The meal is clear out, and we hain't no potatoes, nor anything hardly."

Sam laid down his knife, and drew a twenty-five-cent piece from his pocket.

"That's all I have; I gave you my wages Saturday."

"I know you did; 'twasn't as much as usual, though, 'count of your stopping part of two days." She paused with a half-frightened look when the words were fairly spoken, as if she regretted the allusion. The father had been drinking those two days until he was so wild and violent that the poor wife did not dare to be left alone with him, and Sam had been obliged to remain at home, and as far as he could prevent his doing or receiving any harm.

The boy's brow darkened as she recalled the fact.

"The chances is good for such stops often, as near as I can see. I'll lose my place by it yet."

The mother looked up at him in pitying helplessness.

"Oh no, Sammy, I hope not," she said, at last, in feeble attempt at encouragement. "He'll be over this turn now pretty soon, I guess, and then mebby he'll go to work. I wouldn't wonder if he'd work stiddy all next week."

"Mebby he will, and the week after too," assented Sam, quietly, "and then he'll go on another spree, and it will be just the same thing over again. It ain't no use to talk, mother, no use at all."

She knew it was not, and indeed she had nothing more to say. Presently the voice of the old factory-bell sounded on the still air. The boy swallowed his last mouthful of breakfast hastily, and catching up his hat, hurried away to the mill. The mother withdrew from the table almost as soon, though she had eaten but little, and went out and sat down in the doorway again.

The children quarreled for a moment over the last of the molasses, then settled the matter by dividing it with scrupulous care, and when it was all disposed of, sought their mother.

"How much did Sam give you?" asked Teddy, throwing himself down upon the floor beside her.

"This," opening her hand and displaying the money.

"What you goin' to do with it?"

"I hardly know. The meal is out, and the potatoes too."

"And the molasses," suggested Susie.

"Yes, the molasses too. I s'pose as soon as your father gets ready to eat anything he'll be wanting a bite of meat, and there ain't any in the house."

"Mr. Favisham don't like trusting," said Teddy, recalling the ungracious reception such requests had met.

"Oh dear! I don't know what to do!" responded the mother, drearily.

"Just wait till I'm as big as Sam; I'll work in the mill too, and then we'll live, I guess!" remarked Ted, as if the waiting six or seven years were easily done. To his childish hopefulness the time did not seem very long.

Mrs. Cresly turned the money slowly over in her hand.

"Well, we'll just have to do without any meat or molasses till Sammy gets his wages Saturday. Teddy, you take this quarter up to Favisham's and buy a shillin's worth of meal and a shillin's worth of potatoes with it. Borrow Bobby Dawson's little wagon, and then you can fetch 'em

home easy. Go quick, now, and mind you don't lose the money, that's a good boy."

Favisham's was nearly a mile away, and Teddy drew down his face, not quite sure that he fancied the walk that warm morning. It was only for a moment, however; then he laughed good-naturedly and held out his hand for the money.

"Let me go along and ride in the wagon, will you, Ted?" petitioned Susie.

Ted considered Susie's company was, after all, something of an inducement, and so he answered:

"You can go and ride some of the way if you'll help me draw the wagon the rest of the time."

"Well," replied Susie, and donning her old calico sunbonnet, the two started off together.

The mother watched them as they went down the road shoving their bare toes through the warm dry sand, and wondering how much all that was in the road would sell for if it were sugar instead of sand. There was no excuse for her sitting still any longer, and she arose slowly and went into the house again.

At another house, farther down the street, a bright young wife who had just watched her husband until he was out of sight, off to his work,

went merrily about her house, sweeping, dusting and arranging, and standing off, now and then, to mark the effect, as she placed some article of furniture in a new position. A little farther distant still, Aunt Gray was moving about in her neat cottage, looping back the white curtains from the windows, clipping the dead leaves from the vine at the doorway and arranging the vase of flowers on her little work-table. Very unlike the step of either of these housekeepers was that of Mrs. Cresly as she washed and put away in her almost empty cupboard the few cracked cups and plates that had furnished the breakfast-table. The cornmeal had become too thoroughly dried upon the sides of the kettle to yield readily to cold water, so the pot was filled with water and "put to soak" just outside the door. The room was brushed up a little, and then Mrs. Cresly, remembering that she had promised to try and mend a hole in the sleeve of Sam's coat, hunted up needle and thread, and sat down by the door with the garment upon her lap.

Her task was not more than half accomplished when the door of the little bed-room opened. She started at the sound, and the hand that held the needle trembled, but she turned with a smile, a faint one:

“Well, Simon?”

“‘Well, Simon!’ Should think ’twas ‘Well, Simon!’ S’pose you wouldn’t take the trouble to call a body to breakfast if they went ’thout any till noon!” answered the man, talking somewhat thickly and walking a little unsteadily even yet, from his last night’s debauch.

“I thought you wouldn’t want to be waked till you’d had your sleep out, so I didn’t rouse you,” she said, timidly.

“Well, I’ve had my sleep out, an’ now I want my breakfast. D’ye hear, Melindy?” He brought his fist down heavily upon the table, with an attempt at making his words emphatic that would have been ludicrous had not its cause been so very, very sorrowful.

No, whatever cause for mirth it might afford any others in the village to see the forlorn, ragged “Old Cresly” staggering along the street, it was the saddest of all earthly things to his wife and children. She, his wife, glancing up at him now, sighed a little, used as she was to the sight of his red, bloated face.

“I’ll get you what there is,” she said, “but there ain’t anything but some bread and a little bit of butter.”

"Ain't there any meat?" he demanded. "I'd like a bit of meat."

"There ain't any. I'm sorry, Simon, but there ain't a bit in the house," she answered, in a meek, apologizing way, as if she were to blame for the destitution.

"Yes, that's the way! You're always 'sorry,' and you're always 'out,'" he responded, speaking truly enough, indeed. "Gimme what you've got, then. Ain't there no tea? Let me have a cup of tea, at anyrate."

There was a little, and she had thought to keep it for Sam's supper, but it must go now. She saw no help for it, so she prepared it, and placed it upon the table with the bread and butter. Her husband sat down to his breakfast, and she went back to the door, but she did not take up her sewing. Presently he asked:

"Where's the young uns?"

"I sent 'em off a while ago," she answered, indefinitely, secretly hoping that they might not return with their scant store of provisions until he had gone out.

He did not question any further, and was silent for a time. When he spoke again, it was in an altered tone.

"Melindy, my dear, couldn't you let me have a little money?" he said, coaxingly.

"I haven't any, Simon," she answered, glad that the twenty-five-cent piece was out of her possession.

"Hain't got any? What do you live on?" he demanded, growing angry in a moment.

Then followed a scene that, alas! was not unusual. He begged, commanded, threatened, to all of which she could return but the one answer—that she had no money. He searched the table-drawer, the cupboard, and finally her pocket, and went away at last, muttering angrily, and but half convinced that she was not deceiving him, and had not a few cents hidden away somewhere.

She watched him from the window as he went slowly down the street, trembling lest he should meet the children and discover that they had been to Favisham's with money to spend, fearing both for herself and for them. She took her seat in the doorway once more, and took up her sewing again, but her eyes wandered often from her work to glance anxiously down the street.

Sam had gone to his work that morning with a heart bitter in its sadness—not that the state of affairs at home was any worse than usual that day,

but the burden was growing harder to bear as he grew older. A feeling of humiliation and shame that he had not known when he was younger oppressed him, and the hot blood came to his cheek when he heard any one speak in careless contempt of "Drunken Simon," or "Old Cresly."

His miserable home, and the destitution of his poor, timid, worn-out mother and little brother and sister, weighed heavily upon him, and what could he, only a boy with boy's wages, do for them? Ambitious voices awoke and whispered in his heart sometimes. He so longed for a fairer, better life for himself and for them, to be something different, higher, and the future looked so hopeless. What chance was there, with this chain binding him down? He was nothing—"Old Cresly's Sam," that was all. The weeks were drearily alike as they went by. It was work all through the day, and home (to such a home!) at night, to eat and sleep—when they had money to buy anything to eat, and when his drunken father did not keep the house in such an uproar that they could not sleep.

He thought it all over gloomily as he toiled steadily on. The long room with its row of soiled windows, its black floor worn smooth with the tread of many feet, its heavy iron arms rising and

falling and the great wheels moving on so ceaselessly, while amid all the roar and din of the ponderous machinery human forms moved silently, each in its treadmill round, with faces dark with grime and dust, and hands working busily and patiently,—that was all the world there was for him!

In the course of the morning Mr. Crail, the superintendent, came in, and with him Kent Graham. It was no uncommon thing for Kent to be there; he was often at Clannyford, and had a boyish fancy for visiting the mill. Sam had known him, liked him, indeed, through all the four years he had worked at the mill, yet it seemed an added drop of bitterness in his cup that he should come there that morning. It made his own life show darker still in contrast to this other. How cool and handsome he looked, standing there in his suit of fresh, white linen, carelessly twirling in his fingers the rose he had pulled from Aunt Gray's bushes as he came out! Sam took in the picture in one furtive glance; he would not seem to look toward him.

“Nothing to him, all this hot, dirty work ain’t, only something to be looked at,” he muttered to himself. “He’s nothing to do but just to study

and have a good time, and make something of himself if there's anything to make."

As Mr. Crail and his young companion passed along through the room, Kent looked a little anxiously toward his quondam friend. Sam, and Sam's ingenuity and varied resources, had been the source of not a little of his enjoyment ever since he had been old enough to visit Clannyford. Sam had whittled out bows and arrows for him, and set up miniature water-wheels in the brook, while he looked on in admiration of his skill. Later, it was Sam that had rowed the boat for him in his excursions up the river in the long summer evenings, and Sam that had given him his first lessons in swimming. He had seen him less frequently during the last year, however, and he scarcely knew how to speak to him now, remembering what had passed in the encounter by the roadside a few weeks before. Something of Sam's feeling toward him he dimly guessed, but he did not, could not, wholly understand it or its cause, and after vainly waiting for him to look toward him, he passed on.

In truth, Sam's gloomy bitterness was not the only thing that kept his face turned so steadfastly away; there was a tinge of shame in it, too, as

he recalled the words he had spoken at their last meeting. In his secret heart he knew that Kent was no more responsible than himself for the difference in their lives, and not having such sad cause, had probably never given it the thought that he had. But he would not yield to this thought, and only repeated to himself, "I don't care, anyhow; I wish he'd keep out of the way!"

Sam looked after Kent as he passed on, speaking first to one and then to another, and receiving smiling welcome from all—from some for his own blithe boyish sake, from many, doubtless, because he was the son of Robert Graham, the owner of the mill.

Once, in his interested watching of something going on before him, Kent stepped back into too close proximity to a dangerous piece of machinery. Mr. Crail turned toward him with a quick warning gesture, and he changed his position. Sam started at the instant's peril, but as it passed his train of dark rebellious thought went on:

"'Twould have been an awful thing if he'd got killed! 'Twouldn't make much difference, though, if I should get drawed in there and smashed up some day. I'm nothing to nobody; none of 'em would care much after 'twas all over. Don't know

as I'd care much either, if 'twasn't for mother and Sue. That would end it all, only I ain't such a sneakin' coward as to want to leave them alone, with nothing to eat, and father to scare their lives 'most out; no, I ain't!"

After a time the two went out, Mr. Crail to his office, and Kent to walk slowly up the hill and back to Mrs. Gray's. The hours of the long day dragged wearily, but night came at last. The factory-bell pealed out its edict of release, and suddenly the great wheels that had been rolling on as if in all the world there were no such words as silence and rest trembled and stood still; the iron arms that all day had seemed reaching and grasping dropped quietly and asked nothing more: the day's work was done. There was a rush of many feet from the different rooms of the old mill. Eager hands doffed heavy, soiled aprons and paper caps, and donned hats and sunbonnets. Silent tongues found their use again, and young voices rang out in laughter and merry words, as the groups passed down the stairs and into the open air.

Sam walked homeward soberly and alone. Ted was swinging on the gate, and pushed it open when he saw his brother.

"Father home?" Sam asked as he passed in—

a question scarcely necessary, for Teddy's air of enjoyment told almost as plainly as his words:

"No; he went away this mornin', and hasn't been back since."

There was some relief in that—a better chance for peace, at least. His mother looked up with her wan, uncertain smile as he entered.

"Supper's almost ready," she said, as if that were the best cheer she could offer him.

He sat down by the window, and little Susie stole to his side.

"Sam, we're going to have fried potatoes for supper," she said. "Teddy and me got 'em up to Favisham's, and pa didn't see us bring 'em home; he's been gone away all day."

"Yes, he went away pretty soon after breakfast, and hasn't come back yet," assented the mother as Sam glanced toward her.

"He won't be likely to come back till ten or 'leven o'clock to-night, then. So much the better," muttered the boy.

"I saw Kent Graham to-day," said Ted, coming in and flinging himself down upon the floor. "When I'm a man, I mean to be rich, and have a horse like his, and have fried potatoes every day."

“I don’t believe it,” said Susie, doubtfully; “do you, Sam?”

“I believe he’ll never be anybody but Ted Cresly, that’ll have to work for a living and eat what he can get,” he answered, shortly. It was strange, but even those childish air-castles seemed to vex him.

“No, I won’t, neither,” responded the undaunted Teddy, springing to his feet and making a rush toward the table as his mother announced that supper was ready. “I’ll have a horse. I’m going to ask Kent Graham what he paid for his.”

Supper over, Sam took up his hat and went out. The little house seemed to him close and stifling; he wanted to be in the open air, and sauntered on down the hill to the river. It was a quiet, lonely place. He sat down upon the bank and leaned his head upon his hand. A long time he sat there, scarcely conscious of thinking at all, only enjoying the cool river breeze and gazing out on the water, seeing, heeding nothing else, until a footstep sounded just behind him, and as he turned, Kent Graham’s voice spoke:

“Why, Sam Cresly! I was just thinking of you. I saw our old skiff lying down there a few minutes ago, and I was thinking of the rides we

used to take in it. Don't you want to go out a little while? Perhaps it will be cooler out on the water."

Sam discovered nothing in voice or manner beyond boyish eagerness for a sail, and though his first thought was a wish that he had been left alone, yet he did not feel quite like saying it again, as he had done by the roadside, especially as Kent seemed so entirely to have forgotten that.

"Well," he answered, hesitating a little and then slowly arising from his seat, "I don't care."

"All right! come on, then," responded Kent.

They walked down the bank to the river's edge, unfastened the boat, and Sam, taking the oars, pushed out. There was no growing dark that evening, for before the twilight faded the moon came up, and its soft light was glittering on the water as they glided over it.

"Where shall we go?" asked Sam, in a tone that avowed his own indifference.

"To the bend," Kent answered as briefly.

If Sam had dreaded observation and questioning, he was disappointed; his companion either shared his mood, or else understood and yielded to it, for he made no attempt at conversation and seemed thoroughly absorbed in watching the shifting light

and shade on the sparkling ripples. Sam was left to his musings, with nothing to disturb the quiet but the faint sounds borne from the land and the dash of his own oars. So silently a half hour passed that he had almost forgotten that he was not alone, when Kent suddenly exclaimed,

“The rock! the rock! Take care, Sam! you are running us on to Korl Rock!”

Sam saw at a glance, and pushed out vigorously, but the warning had come none too soon, and it was with difficulty that the little boat cleared the point. Tired with his sudden exertion, and vexed that he had so far forgotten his usual care and skill as to place himself in such a position, he remarked, not very amiably, as he took his seat again,

“You needn’t be uneasy; I ain’t a-going to drown you if I can help it.”

“I should hope not, nor yourself, either. There was quite as much danger for you as for me,” Kent answered.

“’Twouldn’t make much difference about me; I’m no account,” said Sam, the thought of the day sliding into his words. Then he tried to hide its bitterness under a careless laugh as he added: “My life’s nothing to nobody.”

“Nothing to God?” Kent asked, quietly. He



On the River.

was leaning over the side of the boat with his hand in the water as he spoke. Sam did not answer, and when Kent looked up, he scarcely knew whether he had heard or not.

But Sam had heard, for that night as he sat at home, while his mother talked of this, that and the other being "out," and sighed helplessly over their hard lot, he suddenly repeated the question:

"Mother, do you s'pose God cares anything about us?"

"Oh yes, Sammy, I hope so," she answered, in a startled, vague way. "I s'pose he does, when we're good."

"But we ain't good—I ain't, anyhow," persisted Sam.

"Well, I wish I was," said the mother, weakly. "But it seems as if there was always so much to be doing and worrying about that there wa'n't no time for nothing else."

"Say, mother, when you was little, and didn't have to work, was you good then?" asked Teddy, not from any particular interest in the subject, but because of a natural propensity to ask questions.

Suddenly there flashed before the mother's faded eyes a vision of her careless, care-free girlhood—of the almost forgotten wealth of bright hopes and

dreams that had been hers then—and there was a new pang of regret in the answer, given a little slowly and reluctantly :

“No, Teddy, I can’t say as I was ; I don’t know as I thought much about it.”

Teddy was satisfied, but she was not. The thought aroused would not be quieted at once, and it was not altogether a comfortable guest. It was much easier to think of herself as suffering than as sinning—as one to be pitied instead of to be blamed.

To Sam the unanswered question came back more than once in those days of gloomy brooding over his dark life.

So the tiny seed was sown under softening showers of sorrow and warm sunshine of loving mercies, to spring up some day and bring forth fruit. He who watched it knew.



CHAPTER IV.

 PLEASANT room, not very large, but lofty, the green of its mossy carpet matched by the velvet of lounge and chairs, long cases of books filling two sides of the room and beautiful pictures gleaming upon the opposite walls,—this was the library of Graham Place.

The long windows, looking upon the lawn, were thrown wide open. By one of them Mr. Graham was sitting book in hand. Kent was standing at another, too busy with a thought to be more than dreamily conscious of the beautiful view before him or the flower-perfumed air that floated in around him.

“Father,” he said, turning presently, his eye brightening with a quick suggestion that came to him.

“Well?” Mr. Graham laid down his book. Kent’s voice was always sure of attention.

“Bart says he wants some new flower-racks for the garden.”

“Yes; I told him to get them.”

"I was just wondering whether Sam Cresly couldn't make them," said Kent.

"Who?" asked Mr. Graham, wondering a little at Kent's sudden interest in the gardener's arrangements.

"Sam Cresly—out at the mill, you remember."

"Oh yes; well, perhaps he could. What does he want with them?"

"Nothing," answered Kent, laughing. "I was only thinking that perhaps he could make ours. He is pretty ingenious, and has a fancy for whittling and carving a good many things. I believe he could make some nice ones."

"And if he could, it would be quite as cheap and more convenient to get them here in town."

"Yes, sir, I know," said Kent, earnestly; "but then if Sam could do it, I'd like to have him get the money. He is the only one there is to do anything for the family: his father drinks, you know. I think he has a pretty hard time of it; Aunt Gray says so. He could do this in the evenings when he is out of the mill. It is a kind of work that he would like, and I think he would be glad to *earn* the money, though he wouldn't want anybody to give it to him."

"He is none the worse for that feeling," com-

mented Mr. Graham. "But, Kent, Bart is very fastidious about his frames and trellises; I don't know what he will say to trusting an amateur to make them."

"Oh, I can soon persuade him to be willing if you are," Kent said, starting up to go and talk the matter over with Bart at once.

"Tell him that if he does not like them when they are done, he can have them made in town afterward," said Mr. Graham, and Kent's bright face looked back his thanks.

Bart was, as he had said, easily persuaded, and obtaining from him as minute a description as possible of what he wished and the price he should expect to pay for such articles, the boy noted it carefully down, and when he next went to Clannyford sought Sam eagerly.

Nevertheless, when he found him at evening sitting on the low doorstep at home, he broached the subject very cautiously. If we are ever entirely disinterested and unselfish, it is, perhaps, when trying to benefit another without that other's knowledge, or even against his will, concealing the conferring of a favor under the appearance of receiving one, and well content, when all is done, to give instead of receive thanks. Kent felt very

certain that any other kind of help than that which would enable Sam to help himself it would be worse than useless to offer, and though that knowledge increased his respect for the boy, it also increased his difficulty in doing anything to comfort or assist him, and made him very careful that his present proposition should bear the form of a request instead of an offer.

Fortunately for his purpose, Sam was busy with his ever-ready knife when he found him, whittling a shingle into something or nothing, he himself could hardly have told which, for his thoughts were busy with other matters. Kent sat down beside him, and watched him for a few moments silently.

“What are you making?” he asked, at last.

“Why—I don’t know.” Sam held up the stick and viewed it as if that were a question that had not occurred to him before. “Nothing, I guess.”

“It looks a little like one of the boats that you used to make for me,” Kent suggested.

Sam laughed a little.

“Well, I s’pose I can make it into one; it’ll do for Ted. I’m almost always whittling when I have nothing else to do.”

"You always had a fancy for that sort of thing," said Kent, appreciatively. "Sam, don't you suppose you could make some flower-racks?—something neat and pretty for vines to run over, you know? Bart, our gardener, was saying the other day that he wanted new ones, and I thought that you, perhaps, could make some for us. Father told me I might ask you about it the next time I saw you."

Sam dropped his shingle and looked up. He was interested, but he only said,

"I don't know whether I could or not. Any how, I haven't much time, and your folks wouldn't want to wait for 'em."

"Oh, there is no hurry about it," Kent answered. "I only thought that perhaps you could do it in the evenings."

"Maybe I could. But, then, like as not, they wouldn't like 'em after they were done."

"Oh, I can show you pretty nearly what is wanted, for that matter; Bart told me. Look here." Kent picked up a scrap of paper, and taking a pencil from his pocket, outlined the desired shape. "Something after that fashion, you see, only you can make them a great deal prettier, and they need not be all just alike, of course.

Bart wants ten or a dozen of them, and he says they are worth about two dollars apiece."

Sam's face brightened as he studied the little sketch and asked a few questions about it. He was pleased with the proposition, though he only said at last,

"Well, I can try it, anyhow; there isn't any harm in doing that."

"I wish you would," Kent answered, simply, but he too was pleased, and departed presently well satisfied with his success.

Later that evening, sitting in Aunt Gray's little parlor, he told her about it.

"I am very, very glad," she said, in her earnest, interested way. "They need the money badly, no doubt, but even more useful still will be the work itself to Sam. It will be something to call out his ingenuity and stop his brooding so steadily over home troubles. My heart has ached to see the weary, discouraged look the boy has worn lately. I am very glad you thought of this."

But she did not tell him what was also true—that she was more glad for his sake, even, than for Sam's, that she thought to himself would come equal if not the greater benefit. "He that water-eth shall himself be watered," and while she knew

that it would be better for Sam to have his thoughts drawn from useless repining to useful working, she also knew that Kent would be the better for forgetting his own pleasure and enjoyment in caring, working, thinking, for others. Ready to give he had always been, but she longed to see him living and working for something above and beyond himself, and she was glad that this case which had excited his sympathy was one that called for planning, thought and care.

“After all, I can’t do much for him,” said the boy, thoughtfully. “He is so queer, or proud, or something of the sort, that it is hard helping him.”

“Ah, Kent,” said the old lady, smiling, “acceptable helping is one of the fine arts—one that is well worth studying too, though each one must do it for himself, since no one can teach it. Injuries may fall like hailstones, but kindness must come gently as the dew, or it is worthless. There are some who seem to think that when a needy neighborhood is discovered, all that is necessary is to plant the cannon of benevolence upon a neighboring hill and fire an indiscriminate volley upon the place. They have little idea of the effects of such benefactions.”

"Cold pieces, soup-tickets and old clothes," laughed Kent.

"Yes; some are helped, no doubt, but a great many are wounded. Humanity is humanity, whether it is rich or poor, and those who are worthy of help are generally worthy of consideration too."

"Yet those people are trying to do good," said Kent, thoughtfully.

"True, and in so much are better than those who are not trying at all, but it is a pity that they do not find some better way of doing what they have to do."

Kent, who was sitting by the window, suddenly arose and went to the door as a wagon passed. He watched it until it was out of sight, then looked back into the room again.

"Why, aunty, that was Tim Nolan, and he had been drinking until he could hardly keep his seat in the wagon. I fancy he was going home more because the horse knew the way than because of his driving."

"Very likely; he has come home in the same condition twice before this month," she answered, slowly. "I am afraid he will lose his place."

"He will have no one but himself to blame for

it if he does," replied Kent, with something of indignation in his tone. "I suppose there are plenty of good sober men that would be glad of the place too."

Mrs. Gray said nothing. She was thinking, perhaps, that the case had another side to be thought of.

Kent, having judged from one point of view, was suddenly brought to another the next morning. It was a beautiful morning, the air pure and clear, the flowers all laughing through their dewy tears and the birds singing their merriest song, with its self-complacent little interlude, "Hear me! hear me!" It all suited well the care-free, boyish heart, and Kent started gayly on his morning walk, almost forgetting that so lovely a world could hold any care or sorrow in it, until at a little garden gate a downcast face met him. Tim Nolan, with folded arms resting upon the fence, stood looking over into the sandy road beyond, seeming deeply interested in studying the soil, and with something very like a tear in his eye as he looked—Tim Nolan, who was usually the most merry, careless, contented fellow in the whole place.

He raised his head as he saw who was ap-

proaching, and tried to speak in his old rollicking way.

“Ah, thin, Masther Kint Graham, isn’t this the fine day? Sure, it’s gintlemen of leisure like you an’ me that can injoy it, intirely.”

Kent laughed.

“But how does it happen that you are ‘a gentleman of leisure’ to-day, Tim?” he asked. In an instant after he remembered the scene of the previous evening, and regretted his question, guessing its answer.

“Why, thin, didn’t Mr. Crail get so independant of me sarvices as to till me he could get along widout ’em? Shure he did! An’ I wouldn’t be stayin’ where I wasn’t wanted, would I now, Maggie?” turning to his wife, who had arranged her tubs under the shade of a tree, and was washing out of doors to save bringing disorder into her neat little rooms.

She looked up with a faint smile that was very unlike the usually cheery Maggie who went singing about her work. Two little twin girls were playing near her. Kent had often been amused at hearing them talk, the one always so gravely repeated the remarks of the other, but they seemed

to have caught the mother's mood, and were strangely silent this morning.

Tim was not satisfied. It was not so easy to pretend that losing his place was no great misfortune, while Maggie looked so troubled. He tried again, forcing a laugh :

“It's worryin' about the wages she is. But ye needn't be botherin', Maggie darlint. Isn't it variety as is the spice o' life? I'll be doin' something else, I tell ye, and bringin' in plenty more pay.”

“I don't know where you'll go, Tim, nor what it is you'll be doin', an' there's the childer to be fed. It's meself don't know what will come of us,” she answered, sadly.

Tim laughed again.

“Ah, thin, just hear the woman! Isn't the world big enough, an' plenty room in it for the likes of us? Sure, we'll go where they'll be wantin' us more, an' glad to get us. The childer? An' won't it be them that'll dress so fine in the few months that you won't be knowin' 'em, an' have the fine manners that Queen Victory and Prisident Jackson'll be sendin' afther the pattern? It's some fine town we'll go to.”

“It'll no be the pretty place like this, I'm thinkin',

wid the bit of garden an' the grass for the childer to play." Maggie's eyes filled with tears as she glanced about the little home she had worked so hard to make pleasant.

Tim looked after her as she passed into the house, and then suddenly dropping his affected gayety, he turned to his boy-listener with a burst of sorrowful confidence.

"It's meself'll not be worryin' what else isn't in the new place, so there's no dramshops there," he said. "It's that as brings all the trouble an' worry, Masther Kint, and makes a dacent man into a baste, intirely. I drive the mill team to Maltby ivery day, comin' an' goin' right by Favisham's. I'll say to meself in the mornin', 'Now, Tim Nolan, me boy, ye'll be a man for Maggie's sake and the childer's, and kape clear of the murtherin' stuff,' and off I goes, brave an' determined. Mebby I'll go straight by for a wake or two, an' thin some windy day his ould sign—bad luck to it!—will crake in the wind like it was callin', 'Come in and take a drap,' or it'll be a warm day, an' I'll hear the glasses a-jinglin' so cool inside, an' thin it's all over wid me. I goes in, an' there's nothin' worth spakin' of comes out. Misther Crail, he rages, an' Maggie cries, but it's

Tim Nolan as is sorrier than both of 'em, an' jist kapes doin' it over ag'in. Now it's lost me place altogether I have, an' not knowin' what to do next."

"I am very sorry, Tim," said Kent, sincerely. "I can't see why people want to keep such places as that of Favisham's."

"Ye may well be wonderin' that, bringin' plenty of men into trouble that would be glad to kape out, they are!"

Kent did not say to the troubled, discouraged Tim that he had "nobody but himself to blame;" indeed, he did not even think it then, in his pity. The reflected shadow of Tim's face lingered upon his own as he turned away. He did not know of any way in which he could help him, yet he kept thinking of him, and of Maggie's grief at leaving her home. Going down to the mill, he saw Tim's wagon ready for starting off with a new driver. Mr. Crail stood near it, giving some parting directions as it moved away. Kent approached him.

"Wasn't that the wagon Tim Nolan drove? You have sent him away, haven't you?" he asked.

"The drinking scamp! Yes, and I ought to have done it long ago. He was not fit to be trusted

with a team at all; would do very well for several weeks sometimes, and then, perhaps, take one load and never come back for another the whole day, keeping the horses away too, while he took a regular spree."

"I don't believe he would have done it if it hadn't been for driving past Favisham's all the time; that was a steady temptation."

"I don't believe Tim Nolan will drink when he can't get anything to drink," answered Mr. Crail, coolly, "and I don't think he will be very likely to stop until then."

"I am sorry for his wife," said Kent, wishing Mr. Crail had seen and heard just what he had.

"It's a pity he don't care enough about her to try and behave himself. He might have kept his place well enough, for we needed him. I had to take a man from the mill to drive in his place this morning."

Kent's face brightened with a quick thought.

"Will he keep the place? does he like it?" he asked.

"He likes it well enough, but it makes no difference about his keeping the place; I shall have to engage some one for the mill if he does, and for driver if he does not."

"I was thinking if Tim could only take his place in the mill—" said Kent, hesitatingly.

Mr. Crail turned and looked at him a little curiously, then he laughed.

"Kent, my boy, you would make a capital overseer! Just apply to your father for the position when you are a few years older. The idea of discharging refractory employés out of one situation into another until you find something to suit them is novel."

Kent laughed too, and colored slightly; nevertheless he adhered to his point.

"But if Tim were in the mill, he wouldn't be very likely to drink; he would not have the chance. Could not he take that man's place?"

"I'm not quite sure what you mean by 'couldn't he?'" said Mr. Crail, still half laughing. "If it is Tim's ability to do the work, yes, for he has been in the mill before, but if it is my willingness to let him, no, for I won't have such a worthless fellow about." Then, as he saw the boy's sober face, he added, "It's a waste of pity, Kent; he isn't worth it."

"Perhaps not, but I'm afraid he will drink worse when he hasn't anything to do, and I can't help being sorry for his wife if they have to go

away from that little place; she has been working so hard to fix it up."

"That may all be, but as I am not responsible for Tim Nolan's morals or his wife's happiness, but only for having the mill work done faithfully, it does not affect the question any, you see."

Kent did not see, only that it was useless saying anything more, so he turned away. When he told Aunt Gray the story of the morning, she simply answered,

"I thought of all that last night."

Mr. Crail smiled to himself when Kent had left him alone.

"A real boyish idea, that! Give the fellow a place out of pity for his wife and babies, and try to keep him sober and take care of him when he won't take care of himself. Just about such a fancy as Martha would be likely to take into her head! I hope she won't see Tim Nolan, or hear anything about him. Such tender-hearted notions may do very well for her or a boy like Kent, but they would not manage the work of the world very well, and I should have my hands full if I attempted to carry them out. Any man that has not sense enough to keep sober must leave; that is all there is of it!"

Yet when he passed Tim Nolan's that evening, he looked more closely than usual at the little house and garden and fence—perhaps to see what it was that Mrs. Nolan would be so sorry to leave. The two little girls were out at the gate, and seeing him glance toward the house, Miss Mitty remarked, defiantly,

“Don't like you, I don't! You made mammy cry!”

“You made mammy cry. Don't like you!” echoed Kitty.

Mr. Crail pretended not to hear the voices of the twins, but he muttered impatiently to himself, as he passed on,

“That's just the way in this world! No worthless rascal can get his deserts without making some woman cry!”

In Mr. Crail's home there were but two—his sister Martha and himself. Neatness itself the house was, but very quiet; there was nothing to chase away a troubled thought that had crept in. So it happened that, as they sat down to the tea-table with its two lonely sides, he repeated the remark, partly to himself and partly to her, though he did not mean to tell her anything about Tim Nolan:

"It is strange that no miserable scamp can get his deserts without making some woman cry!"

"It is well that it is so," said Miss Martha, quietly.

"I think it is a great nuisance," her brother said, vexed by the answer.

"Because," she went on without heeding the interruption, "we do not know how often Heaven's justice is delayed in the case of some of these 'miserable scamps,' as you call them, because of some woman's pleading cry—how often the wanderer is reclaimed because some woman's heart would break if he were lost."

That was a view of the case he had not taken; higher than an earthly view Mr. Crail did not take of any subject. "All that sort of thing was well enough, but he didn't believe much in it—had nothing to do with it, in fact—yet he did not see but he got along just as well for all that," he was accustomed to say, when any one spoke to him of Christian life and duties. Now a quick suggestion forced its way into his heart: what if his life were blessed by the God he would not acknowledge in answer to Martha's prayers?—his proud head shielded because "some woman would cry"? Was he standing, after all, on Tim Nolan's

platform? That thought was too unwelcome to be cherished for a moment. "Nonsense! I don't believe it!" he said.

Martha looked grieved; she thought he had spoken in answer to her remark. He saw the look, but was not willing to explain what he had meant, and so was silent. He did believe what she had said—ay, and deeper than his own denial, he believed that whispered thought too.

"I don't know why you should doubt it," she said, after a moment's pause, "when he would have spared a whole guilty city for the sake of five innocent righteous if they had been found there."

"If she had known the whole history of that drunken fellow, she could not have argued his case much better," thought Mr. Crail, half impatiently, half wonderingly. "She would pity him, I suppose."

He did not think that he felt any pity for him himself—not even the next morning, when he saw his desponding look as he passed him on his way to the mill. He passed by with a cool nod at first, then hesitated, and finally turned back.

"Tim," he said, suddenly.

Tim raised his head half sullenly.

"One of the mill men is driving your team; if you have a mind to take his place in the mill for a few days, you can do it."

"Thankee, sir; sure, I'll be comin'," Tim answered, simply, but a bright look flashed over his face. It meant more than "a few days" if he did well, he knew, and he turned and went into the house to tell Maggie the good news.

Mr. Crail walked on. He had not known that he had been bearing a burden until he felt that he had lost one by the enjoyment of that free, long breath.

"Ah! you, is it?" he said, in his half-curt, half-kindly way, as Kent Graham overtook him. "Well, I have given your precious object of charity a place in the mill again, and now, if you have any influence with him, do try to make him behave himself."

"Have you? Oh, thank you! I will," exclaimed Kent, rather disconnectedly, but very joyously; "I am very glad!"

"Humph! you are? Well, it isn't likely that it will last very long. The probability is that when he gets his money Saturday night, he will get thirsty too, and going up to Favisham's to buy

groceries, will buy something else that will make him not fit for work on Monday."

It was a *dénouement* by no means improbable, and Kent's bright face sobered as he walked onward toward the wood. The more we do for others, the more interested in them we become, and Kent, who two days before cared very little about Tim Nolan, felt a deep interest now in his struggles and temptations, and was anxious for his success. Sitting alone under the drooping trees, his brain was filled with plans for helping the poor tempted one to keep away from evil, mingled with some vague dreams of the influence he would wield, and the stern battle he would wage against the power of this great wrong, when he became a man. So, while, unconsciously to himself, the boy's heart was growing larger and more tender, broader and quicker in his sympathies, he was also learning by contact and actual observation a deeper abhorrence of a great evil and a keener pity for its victims than books or lectures could have taught him.

Mr. Crail's predictions were not verified for the next Saturday night, at least. Maggie Nolan's bright black eyes were open and vigilant, and after anxiously watching her husband for a time,

while he made his preparations for starting to the grocery, she finally ventured to say :

“Tim dear, if ye wouldn’t mind stayin’ home a bit wid the childer, an’ puttin’ on the kettle when it’s time, it’s meself could go to Favisham’s an’ bring the things. Sure, I know Teddy Cresly would go an’ help me, an’ jist stayin’ in the house all day, it’s mebbly the walk would be doin’ me good, I’m thinkin’.”

“More likely it would, Maggie,” answered Tim, with a twinkle in his eye ; “anyhow, it wouldn’t be doin’ ye hurt, an’ that’s more an’ can be said of some of yer acquaintances, me jewel, so just you go. Put the kettle on, is it? Indade, an’ I will, an’ make the tay besides, so fine, intirely, that ye’ll niver be able to drink yer own makin’ after once ye have a taste of it. It’s good housekeepers me an’ the childer will make ; so be off wid ye !”

Maggie went, and came back with light, free step, though with heavy basket, and when Monday morning came, Tim was ready to go to his work soberly and faithfully.

CHAPTER V.

THE long summer twilight had faded, and Sam Cresly, who had been for the last two hours busy at the bench he had erected in one corner of the yard, could no longer see to work, and began slowly gathering up tools and pieces of wood to carry them into the house. The last of his flower frames would soon be done now. He was almost sorry that it was so, they had furnished him pleasant employment so many evenings, kept his thoughts busy and called into exercise his taste and ingenuity. Teddy and Susie had watched the daily growing into shape of the different patterns with great delight, and even his mother had awakened into some interest and admiration.

“They’re just real pretty, Sammy—pretty enough for anybody’s garden. I didn’t know you was so handy,” she had said.

And then they had had a talk—pleasanter than their home talks usually were—of what should be bought with the money those would bring. Twenty-four dollars would be no small addition

to their cramped treasury. It was extra money, too, earned by extra work, and should not go to Favisham's for groceries; they could purchase some other things with it—things long needed. Sam remembered that evening talk well, for it had given him almost his first dream of what a home it was possible even his might be under different circumstances. His mother had been sitting beside him in the low doorway, Teddy in his favorite position on the floor and Susie near by. The children's eager voices had joined in the planning now and then, and their extravagant ideas of what could be purchased with the money that seemed to them such a great sum brought a faint smile even to the mother's pale lips, and aroused her into something like animation and cheerfulness for a few minutes. But the work, its object and what he expected from it Sam had kept a secret from his father; it was not safe to trust him with it. He was thinking of it this evening—that something pleasant would be gone out of his life when this work was done. There would be no more planning for or looking forward to anything then, outside the old dreary routine.

The quick opening and shutting of the garden gate made him pause, his arms full of the pieces

of wood he had just gathered up, and turning, he saw a man pass quickly up the walk and knock at the door. He started forward, and the stranger saw him, and had turned toward him when Mrs. Cresly opened the door.

"It's nothing, ma'am—I—that is—it was Sam I wanted to see," he stammered out, in a quick, confused way. "I didn't see he was in the yard until I knocked;" and he sprang off the steps and hurried toward him.

Sam recognized him as a man he had sometimes seen about the mill, and oftener in the neighboring village about the store, and wondered what had brought him there.

"Well," he said, interrogatively, "what's wanting?"

But the stranger did not find it easy to make his errand known; he spoke hesitatingly.

"Why, the fact is— Well, it was an accident up at Favisham's, and your father, you know— They sent me to tell you."

"What about him?" asked the boy, gruffly enough, but with a strange feeling at his heart and suddenly dropping the armful he held.

"Run over by the train," said the man, slowly. "'Twas at the railroad-crossing, and he wasn't

over-steady, I s'pose, and maybe he didn't notice. Anyway, 'twas him, and he was killed in a minute. I couldn't just say it all sudden to your mother, but—"

Sam glanced at the doorway. His mother stood there still, and she had heard, not all, but something—enough to make her pale face whiter still, and to change the usually dull, hopeless expression of her eyes to a startled, agonized look. When she caught Sam's glance, her voice rang out, unlike itself in its quick, sharp tone :

"Sammy, what is it?"

The stranger started when he heard it, and as Sam went toward her he slowly followed.

"What did he say, Sammy? What was it about your father?" she asked again, but without looking at him, her eyes fixed instead upon the one who had brought the tidings.

"Tell her," said Sam, briefly.

The man hesitated and cast a troubled look from mother to son.

"He was on the railroad-crossing when the cars came along, and didn't see them, and he was—hurt."

"Killed," Sam said, slowly, as if trying to comprehend the word. His mother took it up.

"Killed! dead!" She sank down trembling and covered her face with her hands.

The shock was dreadful—the thought of that sudden, awful death, terrible. But it was not the heavy stroke of bereavement that they felt—how could it be? The knife which removes a painful tumor may, indeed, cut as sharply as that which takes off a precious right arm, but when all is over, the one has occasioned a bitter, lifelong loss, while the other has but wrought a deliverance; however cruel the pang, remembered even with shuddering, yet a deliverance still.

Sam folded his arms and leaned back against the house, silent after that one word. The children came to the door and looked first at him, then at their mother, then at the stranger. The man lingered uneasily for a few minutes, then he whispered to Sam:

"I must go now. You'd better go along to fix things up and say what you want done, hadn't you? They told me to come for you. Send for some of the neighbors to stay with your mother."

But the tidings had already been carried to other homes, and Maggie Nolan was even then coming in the gate.

"I'm going along with him, mother," said Sam.

"Mrs. Nolan will stay here, I guess?" with a questioning glance toward the kindly little neighbor.

"Sure, I will, poor dear!" was the answer, given pityingly.

The walk was a silent one. The stranger, glad that the unwelcome errand he had undertaken was so nearly accomplished, and that the one dread fact had been made known, volunteered no further information, but hurried his companion forward, and the boy asked no questions. The lamps were lighted when they reached Favisham's, but there were not as many in the store as often gathered there at evening. At the little station beyond quite a crowd had collected on the long platform, gathered in little groups and talking low. On a long wooden bench at the farther end of the platform something was lying—a motionless form covered with a white sheet that some merciful hand had thrown over it. When the boy and his companion approached, there was a moment's pause and silence among the talkers. Some one took up a lantern, led the way to the still figure and lifted the covering.

Oh, it was horrible! Sam turned away, sick and shuddering, after one glance, walked to a little distance and sat down. They gathered about him

then with a few explanations, questions and suggestions. There was little more to be told than he knew already. His father had been at Favisham's all the afternoon and had started home at evening, in what condition, there was no need to tell. Some one at the station, seeing the approaching train, called to him as he reached the crossing, but he did not heed—did not hear, perhaps—and staggered on. The warning call was repeated, and then seeming suddenly to awaken to a sense of his danger, he attempted to quicken his unsteady steps, stumbled and fell, and in another instant was beyond the reach of all earthly aid.

The necessary arrangements were soon made, but the moon was shining down upon the old road, making its sand seem like grains of silver, when the party passed slowly over it with their burden. Neighbors had gathered in the little house, and kind hearts and willing hands had been at work to make the place look neat and orderly as far as was possible with the poor materials at command. The wife so lately widowed sat a little apart, quite silent save as some one spoke to her, trying to realize what this was that had come to her and mourning most of all that she could not mourn. Her thoughts wandered back over the past, all she

had hoped, all she had been disappointed in, all she had borne. Bitterness, fear and blame died away now in a great solemn pity as, instead of the reeling figure that was wont to stagger in, there was borne this motionless form.

The two children looked on awed and frightened, but not grieved, and there being no one to pay any attention to them, stole away to a distant corner to discuss the event by themselves.

“Oh, it’s awful to be dead, ain’t it?” said Susie, with a little shudder.

“Yes,” answered Teddy, opening and shutting his little brown hand, and trying to discover what it was that made it move and that would stop its moving by and by, imagining, child-fashion, how it would *seem* to be cold and still.

“Annie Clark cried like everything when her pa died,” pursued Susie, meditatively. “Teddy, are you sorry?” lowering her voice to a whisper.

“I don’t know,” answered Teddy, slowly; “only, he won’t never strike us any more, and we won’t have to stay round out doors at night when we’re sleepy ’cause we’re afraid to come in an’ go to bed, an’ we won’t ever have to watch when we go up to Favisham’s after meal, to keep him from seein’ us an’ takin’ the money away.”

“No,” answered Susie; “I guess I’m a’most glad, if ma didn’t look so.”

Shocking? Aye, it was shocking—and most shocking in that it was true! A father’s death brought relief.

The little cottage wore an air of unwonted quiet and order the next afternoon. The old curtains, freshly done up, were drawn before the open windows, fluttering a little, as if conscious of their improved appearance, as the summer breeze stole in. Teddy and Susie, washed and dressed in clothing that skillful fingers had made clean and whole for them, presented an unusually neat appearance. The mother, too, in the plain black dress that had been provided for the occasion, looked better than he ever remembered to have seen her before, Sam thought, and found himself wondering how much it would cost to keep her and the children looking always as well as they did then.

Presently the people began to gather in, two and three at a time, until the room was filled and many were standing outside around the door and windows. Soon a little stir and turning of heads among those in the doorway told that the minister expected from the city had arrived. They moved

aside to let him pass, and he took his station in the centre of the room.

What could he say above *that* coffin? It may be that he asked himself the question as he looked down upon it very sadly. There could be no triumphant, "O death, where is thy sting?" no sweet, "He giveth his beloved sleep;" no precious benediction, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord." He spoke of the bright river of the water of life flowing from the central throne; of the "many mansions" away beyond sin, and sorrow, and death; of the fair country whose glory eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive. He spoke of Him who is the resurrection and the life, in whom, believing, none can ever die; of the full and free invitation, "Whosoever will, let him come;" of the rich and countless promises "to him that overcometh," the new name, the white raiment, the morning star, the throne. But he spoke *to* the living, not *of* the dead, and the silence was terrible in its significance. Some words of warning he uttered, too, solemn and tender, but few, for the confined form before him was in itself a more impressive warning than human lips could breathe.

Sam sat, with head bowed upon his hands, listening, thinking as he had never thought before, and ere the words were ended the question that had been lingering in his heart through those weeks was answered. His life *was* something to God. Whatever he might be to the world, before the Maker and the King of all he stood even as others—a precious, priceless soul. He did not yet know what to do with the knowledge, he made no resolutions then, but the thought was born and would not die.

The hymn, sad and low, the fervent, solemn prayer, were ended, and out from the low doorway, along the pleasant street, to the quiet, lonely little graveyard, they bore the dead. The sunlight fell as brightly into the open grave as upon the grass-grown mounds around it, yet many a tearful eye turned from it to them with a deep breath of thankfulness that they were not like this. The dear old words, sweet and strong in all their rich depth of meaning—"In hope of a glorious resurrection"—no one repeated there as they turned away and left the sleeper to his sleep.

When the evening fell again, the little family at the cottage were once more alone. The countless kindly offices suggested by warm hearts had been

performed, and those who had been passing in and out, planning, assisting and directing, all day, had departed to their own homes. Ted and Susie, awed and subdued somewhat by the events of the day, and almost equally, perhaps, by the unwonted order of the house and their own neat apparel, sat quietly by one of the windows talking to each other in low tones. The mother, in an old chair by the opposite window, was rocking slowly to and fro, and Sam, watching both her and the children, was silently thinking. No added necessity for labor, no new responsibility, had fallen upon the boy, and yet he felt in some way, that night, as if the family, from belonging to another, had suddenly become his own. There had been no one but him to do for them before, yet they had never seemed so entirely and rightfully his to work for and care for as now, and he found himself forming countless plans for something better than the old life for them and for himself.

That same evening Miss Crail, walking up the street with slow and thoughtful step, paused at Mrs. Gray's. Welcome there she always was—it would have been strange if those two had not been friends—so she dropped easily into her favorite seat by the window like one quite at home.

"Mrs. Gray," she said, "we must have a Sunday-school here."

Mrs. Gray laid down her knitting, and turning to her visitor, replied :

"My dear, I'm very glad to hear you say so. I have been thinking for a long time that we *ought* to have one, but if you say *must*, that is one step farther ahead. It is a stronger word, and, I trust, a more hopeful one."

Miss Crail laughed a little at her own earnestness.

"I did not think what word I was using," she said, "and the matter presented itself to me more in the light of a necessity than a duty, I believe." She paused a moment, picked up the old-fashioned fan that lay beside her, and the deep seriousness came back to her face again as she explained :

"What is to become of these Clannyford children? I could not help thinking about it to-day, looking up from that grave and seeing so many of them gathered there. Are they to be left to live such miserable lives as his? Many of them have almost no home training, so far as anything good is concerned, and they are thrown in the way of temptation from the very first. Nearly all the groceries used by the mill families come from Fav-

isham's, and the children are sent there of errands as soon as they can be trusted to go alone. They grow accustomed to the place, the language and the company, and learn to like it early, and to be in no hurry to come away; they get into a habit of loitering about and listening to what is going on among the older ones. Then on Sunday— Well, since the new schoolhouse has been finished, we have had one service there regularly every Sabbath, but that occupies but a small part of the time. The men wander off to Favisham's—I know some of them do not go to church at all, but even some who do, go to Favisham's afterward—and the boys do the same. If they had some other place to go, something better to do, it might help to keep the children at least out of danger."

"And the instruction given may make them stronger to battle with temptation when they must meet it," Mrs. Gray replied. "Yes, you are right; we need a Sabbath-school."

"And can we have it, do you think?" Miss Crail asked.

Mrs. Gray smiled.

"You said 'must' at first. It is a good word for its place; do not go back from it."

"There are six or seven who would do for

teachers, I think," said Miss Crail, thoughtfully. "‘Would do,’ in both senses of the word, I mean—ability and willingness—and who would gladly help to carry out the plan, if we propose it."

Mrs. Gray noticed that little word "we," and answered it somewhat sadly :

"Ah, my dear, whatever I can do, I will do heartily, but I am not young any longer, nor very strong, and the heaviest of this burden will fall upon you, I fear."

"Stronger in her weakness than many of us are in our strength," Miss Crail thought. She simply answered: "I know," but her glance said how well she knew the extent and worth of her friend's efforts, counsel and advice in such a cause.

"I want you to tell me I am right," she said, "and then I am ready to go ahead."

"You are right, my dear. God speed you," answered the old lady, earnestly.

Having determined, Miss Crail was not one to delay acting, and the next day found her busy among the people. No young girl, moved by a sudden impulse of girlish enthusiasm, was she, but a woman, earnest, patient and brave, whose firm step was yet a very quiet one—learned, it may be, in the dark valley of shadows whither she had

been called to go down with one after another of her beloved. Her clear voice had grown softer and lower than it once had been, and her eyes, looking kindly and charitably upon the world, looked also beyond it.

She had little difficulty in obtaining the parents' consent that their children should attend the school. Some were pleased, some indifferent, but good-naturedly compliant, and a few, who might have opposed the plan itself, assented with seeming grace, influenced by the fact that Miss Crail was sister to the superintendent of the mill.

"Willing to let the childer go? indade, an' I am, ma'am!" answered rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed Maggie Nolan, gratified at the attention bestowed upon her and hers. "Hitty an' Mitty shall go, an' Mikey too, if he was only a bit bigger," catching up the baby from the floor.

The lady turned away laughing, and meeting Sam Cresly near the gate, stopped to ask him about Ted and Susie. Would they like to come, did he think? and would he like to have them?

There was kindness and rare tact in the act and in those few words. The presence of the children might, indeed, have been secured without it, but many lessons in the school might have failed to do

them as much good as that frank acknowledgment of his right to be consulted and the courteous asking of his opinion had done Sam. It increased his sense of responsibility and *proprietaryship* in the family, and brought an added feeling of self-respect too. His answer, though given rather shyly and hesitatingly, had in it nothing of the carelessness or bitterness that he might have felt a few weeks before.

“Yes, ma’am; they hain’t nothing to do at home on Sundays, and I expect they’d like it; they can come well enough and it will be good for them. I’ll tell mother about it.”

He walked on, thinking the matter over all the way home, and so, by the time he reached there and told Miss Crail’s proposition, he was ready to add:

“I told her I guessed they’d come—anyhow, they’d better; a chance to learn something and be somebody ain’t to be throwed away.”

“Yes, but what’ll they wear?” said Mrs. Cresly, despondingly. “There’s them things that was fixed up for ’em yesterday, but they’re old and thin, and won’t do to wear more’n three or four times before they’ll be all out.”

“Then they must have some new ones,” said

Sam. "They ain't going ragged; they're going to look like other folks' children."

"Jolly!" ejaculated Master Ted, while his mother looked up in astonishment at such a novel proposition.

"There's the frames," continued Sam. "I'll have 'em done pretty soon, and then you can get something new for the children."

"A new dress! Oh, ma! oh, Sam! A new *pink* dress, will you?" exclaimed Susie, her black eyes dancing with delight. "Oh, Teddy! won't it be nice?"

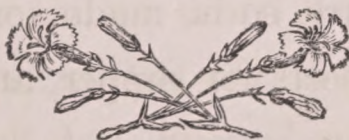
"How can I tell when I hain't seen it?" queried Ted, provokingly practical. "Am I goin' to have a new jacket too, Sam?"

Sam did not like to show how pleased he was with their pleasure, so he made some inquiry concerning the prospects for supper, and strolled away out of doors again.

No long sermon on his duties as an elder brother would have appealed so directly and powerfully to Sam as Miss Crail's few words had done. So her school in its embryo had already begun, though indirectly, its blessed lessons—teachings which she only dimly guessed when, among the group that gathered that first Sunday in the schoolhouse, she

recognized the young Creslys. They were clean and neat, and brightly awake to all that was said and done, and at the close little Susie slipped her hand into Miss Crail's and whispered in a sudden burst of confidence :

"We're coming all the time, Teddy and me. Sam wants us to, and ma said we might, 'cause Sam means to get us new clothes to come with. He said so."



CHAPTER VI.

A LITTLE head surmounted by a ragged cap was pressed close against Mrs. Gray's garden fence, and a pair of bright black eyes peering in between the pickets took a long and wistful survey of the place. Presently a small brown hand was thrust in and a cluster of beautiful crimson flowers drawn out, though without severing them from the stem. The little fingers passed over them with admiring but careful touch, examining curiously leaf and blossom, and shaking the dew from out the tiny cups. Then they were pushed back again, and a white lily growing near by drawn out instead. Other flowers were growing beyond, but they were out of reach, and satisfied at last with his limited observations, the owner of the busy fingers allowed the white bell to sway back to its place. He climbed upon the fence then and unfastened the gate, and soon the bare feet were pattering up the walk.

“Want to buy any willer baskets?” said a childish voice on the portico.

Mrs. Gray dropped her sewing, startled a little by a voice so near, when she had not seen any one approaching, and went to the open door.

"No—I don't know," she said, the first in answer to the question, the second because of the questioner, for the light willow baskets extended toward her were common enough to be met with anywhere, but not so the one who carried them.

It was a boy of some six years, ragged and dirty, presenting an appearance half comical, half forlorn, in the old garments, far too large for him, which he wore. But the sunbrowned face had a certain childish beauty of its own, and the large dark eyes lifted to the lady's face were such as few could meet unkindly—certainly not Mrs. Gray. She took one of the baskets and examined it, saying, with a smile:

"Why, you are a little fellow to be out selling baskets alone!"

"Used to be; guess I'm pretty big now," answered the child, looking down at his feet and then slowly raising his eyes, as if trying to estimate his own height.

"How much do you ask for these?"

"Fifteen cents for the little un and twenty cents for t'other."

"And suppose I buy one of them, what will you do with so much money?" she asked, laughingly.

"Carry it to maum," he answered, gravely and honestly.

She took one of the baskets and paid him the price he had named. He drew an old stocking foot from his pocket, slipped the change down into it and tied it tightly with a piece of string, then with a triumphant air replaced it in his pocket. The lady watched him, amused and interested.

"Where does your mother live?" she asked.

"Who?" The black eyes looked a little bewildered. "Maum? Oh, she lives out a piece in the woods. We didn't al'ays; comed here t'other day, a while ago."

"And where did you come from?"

"Dunno; good ways off."

"In a wagon, or cars?" she questioned, thinking that perhaps she might learn from what direction they had come.

The child's eyes opened wider still.

"Tramped," he answered, laconically.

Mrs. Gray took up her sewing again, but the little fellow still lingered near the open door, glancing wistfully up and down the vine-shaded

portico and out into the pretty garden. Noticing it, she said,

“Are you tired? Sit down there in the portico and rest a while, if you want to.”

He availed himself of the permission without a word, and leaning his head back against the door-frame, stretched out his brown, dusty little feet contentedly. A kindly thought prompted the old lady to lay down her work a second time, and going out into her tidy kitchen, she presently returned with a large slice of bread and butter so generously spread with jam as to suit any juvenile taste and prove a rare delicacy to this poor little waif, who accepted it eagerly.

“You did not tell me your name,” she said, pleasantly.

“Name’s Dan.”

“And your father?—have you a father?” she asked.

Dan devoured several mouthfuls of the bread and butter without replying, and then he said,

“Feller axed me that once. Dunno. What’s a father?”

She looked at the child in astonishment. Then a possible explanation suggested itself, and almost unconsciously she spoke it aloud:

"Perhaps he is dead?"

"S'pose so," answered Dan, composedly. "Joe's dead; dunno where Pipe is."

"And who came with you here?"

"Nobody; comed myself."

"But when you came to this place to live, I mean?—when you came from a great way off?"

"Oh, granny, an' Bill, an' maum, an' Moll, an' Sime, an' me."

"And are Bill, Sime and Moll your brothers and sister?"

"Yes, guess so," the child answered, rather slowly and doubtfully.

It was useless trying to learn anything about his family. Mrs. Gray abandoned the attempt, discouraged, but with her interest in the boy deepened by his seeming to know so little to whom he belonged, or even the meaning of the names that should have been dearest.

"You don't know how to make these baskets, do you?" she asked, after a few minutes.

"No; maum an' Moll makes 'em." He hesitated a little, then looked up at her curiously, and asked a question in return:

"Did you make the pretty red an' white things grow out there?" pointing to the flowers.

"I planted the seed ; God made them grow."

No comprehending light flashed into the dark eyes, and watching his face, she proceeded :

"God made everything—the birds, and trees, and flowers, and sky. You knew that, didn't you?"

"I dunno," replied the little one, in a wondering, bewildered way.

"Didn't you know who made you?"

"Why, nobody !" he answered, in astonishment.

"I'm folks."

"But folks are made. God made every one."

She said the words slowly and reverently, and then was silent, wondering what she could say next, and how she could best teach him and make him understand. But she had time for nothing more. He started from his seat and gathered up his baskets.

"Maum'll be mad if I don't hurry," he said, and in a moment he was gone.

So the one truth, at once so simple and so grand, was left to stand alone for the time in his childish thought, if indeed he thought of it at all. Mrs. Gray wondered, as she watched the little oddly-arrayed figure pass down the street, whether the child had apprehended or would recall the thought, and she determined to see him again, and, if pos-

sible, learn something about him and those to whom he belonged.

There were more difficulties in the way of carrying out her resolution, however, than she had at first thought. The little basket merchant's visit was followed by several days of rain, and when the sun again shone out clear and bright enough to allow her to make any explorations in the outskirts of the village, her efforts were fruitless. "Live out a piece in the woods," was all the information the child had given her, and that was not very definite in a country so thickly wooded as that about Clannyford. She did not know in what direction to go, and she began to think that what had seemed a "little piece" to Dan's bare feet, accustomed to "tramping," would be far too long a journey for her, and that, indeed, they could not have erected a cabin very near the village without some one having noticed or known about them. None of her neighbors could furnish any information, though a number of them had seen the child, and at some of the houses a girl, almost a woman, had called afterward, offering the same kind of baskets for sale.

"I'll tell you, Mrs. Gray," said Mrs. Clark, laughing; "ask Teddy Cresly about it. What

that young one doesn't know about anything of that sort, it would be little use for either of us to try to find out. He wanders about everywhere, and if there is any strange set of folks living near by, it's likely he knows it."

Mrs. Gray accepted her advice and questioned the boy, though cautiously, when she next saw him. She did not wish to intimate that there was anything peculiar or unusual about the strangers, or direct any attention to the little wanderer that might subject him to teasing and annoyance, and perhaps drive him away altogether, so she made a simple inquiry:

"Do you know any people living anywhere near Clannyford who make willow baskets, Teddy?"

"No'm; I seen a girl sellin' some two or three days ago. Does she live round here?"

"I do not know; not very far away, I think," she replied.

"I wish I knowed where! I'd like to see how they make 'em," said Teddy, with a look in his eyes that told his curiosity had been excited, and that it was very probable he would "know where" before long.

Nearly two weeks passed away without Mrs. Gray's seeing or hearing anything of the child

that had so interested her, and she had in a measure forgotten him when one afternoon he suddenly made his appearance again.

"Why, Dan! is it you?" she exclaimed, glancing at the open door as a shadow fell across her work.

"Yes, it's me," answered the little one, waiting for no invitation to be seated, but throwing himself down upon the portico.

"And where are your baskets?" she asked, noticing that he had none with him.

"Sime's sellin' 'em this time."

"And what are you doing?"

"Gettin' old clo'es an' cold pieces. Got any?" he replied, as if his occupation were the most natural in the world.

She glanced at the miserable garments he wore, her pity for and interest in the boy growing deeper. At last she said, slowly, as though her thoughts had wandered back to the past and it was not quite easy to recall them and speak the words,

"Would you like to have some good whole clothes that would fit you and make you look nice and clean, Dan?"

"Yes," answered Dan, not as though he felt any great need of the articles mentioned, however.

“And have your face and hands washed, and your hair brushed?” continued the lady.

“Yes,” answered Dan again, but rather more doubtfully.

She went up stairs to a drawer long locked—how long, her heart knew to a month and day—and from among the articles folded away there she selected a suit of boy’s clothing dark and serviceable. Others, too fine in fabric or in fashioning to suit her purpose, were carefully replaced, and over those which she had taken her fingers lingered with a slow, caressing touch, as if there were something of sacrifice and pain in what she was about to do.

Yet she did not hesitate, and so, after considerable patient effort and perseverance on her part, and some patient endurance on his, the transformation was effected, and the little ragged, dirty Dan presented himself thoroughly washed and combed, and neatly and comfortably dressed. His face, bright from its introduction to soap and water, looked quite handsome, and the satisfaction with which he viewed his own changed appearance was unbounded. He sat upon the portico quietly and soberly for some time, surveying himself with grave admiration. At last he remarked :

"Sime'll be mad."

"Why?" Mrs. Gray asked.

"'Cause he hain't got none."

"Is Sime larger than you?"

"Yes; he's big. Sells baskets an' gets cold pieces; so does Moll. I liked what you give me to eat t'other day," he added.

"Did you?" Mrs. Gray smiled, and taking the hint, produced the wished-for lunch.

Dan divided it with scrupulous care, and laid half down beside him while he ate the other half.

"Don't you want it all?" Mrs. Gray asked.

The child looked up at her as if such a question were absurd.

"That's for Sime. He's mad when I don't save him none; he said he'd lick me if I didn't."

"Is Sime cross to you?"

"When I don't save him nothin' an' he's mad," answered the little fellow, in a matter-of-course way, as if that were all that could be expected under such circumstances.

Mrs. Gray hesitated a moment between her disinclination to yield anything to the elder boy's tyranny and meanness and her desire to shield her little favorite, then she said:

“You can eat it all; I will give you some for Sime before you go.”

The boy eagerly availed himself of the offer. She watched him silently for a little while, and then she asked:

“Do you remember what I told you, the other day when you were here, about who it is that makes everything?”

“Yes.” He looked up brightly. “I told Sime, an’ he said he knowed it.”

He had remembered, then, and thought something about it! The loving, Christian heart took courage.

“Did He make all them out there for you?” asked the child, presently, glancing into the garden admiringly, as he had done at first.

“Yes, everything — green grass, trees and flowers.”

“Did you see ’em made?” he questioned, earnestly.

She tried to explain to him as simply and clearly as possible how the flowers grew, nurtured by sun, and dew, and rain, and who cared for them and all that makes the world so beautiful. Then she told him something of the still lovelier world beyond, unseen as yet, but made by the same hand;

of those for whom it is prepared, and the way thither.

He sat very quietly, his head thrown back and his eyes wandering over the garden, listening apparently, but saying nothing, and she could not tell how much he comprehended. By and by he started up suddenly.

“There’s Sime!”

She looked toward the gate, and saw leaning against it a boy who must have been sixteen or seventeen years of age—a tall, lank figure shabbily clothed, and with an air and attitude that told their own story of indolence and uselessness.

“And that great boy makes you divide whatever is given to you with him!” she exclaimed, involuntarily, in her first feeling of indignation.

“He’ll be mad if I hain’t got nothin’,” said the child, with an anxious look, as if to remind her of her promise.

She fulfilled it, though not as willingly as she had provided something for the little boy himself, and the child hurried down the walk. She watched him until he joined his companion and they started off together.

She had not learned where they lived, but Teddy Cresly soon discovered the whereabouts of their

cabin, and visited it. Mrs. Clark had been very nearly right in what she had said about Teddy—he was an arrant young explorer, so far as the woods about Clannyford were concerned. No one knew better than he where the sweetest strawberries and largest blackberries grew; where the most plentiful supply of nuts could be gathered and the freshest evergreens found. If hoarhound, slippery-elm or golden seal were needed for the treatment of any cold or ailment, he knew where to find them, and more than one bright piece of silver he had become the possessor of in reward for such services. Perhaps his love of wandering about had arisen, in part, from his having so unpleasant a home in which to stay—from which, indeed, he had often been driven by his father's drunken fury. However that might be, he had learned to love the wood, and often roamed through it for hours alone. Having learned that the basket-makers resided, or were supposed to reside, somewhere in the vicinity of the village, he could not rest until he had found them. That done, he presented himself at Mrs. Gray's one day.

“I've found them basket-folks, Miss Gray, I have,” he announced, a little triumphantly.

“Well, where do they live?” she asked.

"Oh, out in the woods. 'Tain't very near, no how; it's as much as a mile'n a half away."

"No other house near it?"

"No'm; that ain't a house neither—nothin' but a shanty they made themselves, with holes cut in the boards for winders. I could build as good a one as that myself," said Teddy. "There wasn't nothin' much inside of it—only the folks, an' a bench, an' a kittle."

"Why, did you go in?" asked Mrs. Gray, amused.

"Yes'm; I wanted to find out how they made them baskets, an' I seen 'em do it. After a while that big feller—Sime—he come round and told me I'd better git out, so I come away. He's a good deal bigger'n me, you know," Teddy said, as if apologizing for taking his leave so hastily.

Mrs. Gray laughed.

"He was not very polite," she said. "But, after all, Teddy, you might not like to have a stranger come into your house, you know, to watch what you were doing."

Teddy laughed too, good-naturedly.

"I wouldn't care. Guess Sam wouldn't have 'em round, though; I didn't think of that," he answered.

Mrs. Gray never visited the cabin—it was too far for her—but Miss Crail went. Her interest in little Dan had been so awakened that she determined to know something of those by whom he was surrounded and the manner in which they were living. An order for a large basket which she wished made furnished her with an errand, but the visit was not very satisfactory. She could learn but little about them; and the prospect of materially benefiting them seemed small, as they evidently preferred their idle, vagabond life to any other.

“They are real Yauncees,” she said to Mrs. Gray, afterward. “I scarcely know how they came away here by themselves, there is usually such a tribe of them together.”

However it was that they had come, they seemed content to remain for a while, and during the summer and fall little Dan, and even Sime and Moll, became well known in Clannyford. Miss Crail succeeded, after a time, in securing the little one’s attendance at Sabbath-school—granted in a great measure, no doubt, because of expected benefits. After having once been there he was rarely absent, but the others it seemed almost impossible to reach in any way. Employment was offered to

the man and to Sime, but they never could be induced to work more than a day or two at a time. The few baskets sold and what they could beg about Clannyford would not, of course, suffice for even their miserable style of living, but they owned a poor half-blind old horse and a dilapidated wagon, and with these they made trips off to the neighboring cities and through the country, collecting what they could. After the first novelty had worn away, it was seldom that any of the villagers went near the cabin, where visitors were evidently unwelcome, but little Dan grew to be a favorite in more homes than one.

Kent Graham recognized the child in one of his visits to Mrs. Gray's, and gleefully related how and when he had first met him. Dan remembered too.

"It rained an' you couldn't go away," he said. "You had that on," pointing to Kent's watch.

"What made you move away from that place?" Kent asked.

"Dunno; on'y Bill, maum an' Sime come."

"Where is Sime now?"

"Gone off long o' Bill."

Whether Sime ever saw and recognized him or not, Kent did not know, or whether it was because

of that individual's cautiousness or only in the natural course of events that he never met him.

With the exception of the strangers, matters in Clannyford went on outwardly much as usual. Sam Cresly still worked in the mill, but with a heart growing stronger and braver, more self-reliant and hopeful, though he was scarcely conscious of the fact. Gradually, too, a change was coming over his home. The frames had been finished and pronounced satisfactory, and the money for them had bought Susie's longed-for pink dress and many other articles beside. Mrs. Cresly found herself in a novel position when for the first time in years she went into a store with the idea of looking out something *pretty* for her child, it was so long since that word had been used in connection with anything to be worn in their family. The dress having been selected, and material for a jacket for Teddy besides, she aroused into a little motherly anxiety that they should be made up nicely, and Mrs. Clark was appealed to for patterns. She could not have applied to a better one in such a case than that same cheery, sunshiny, good-natured woman. Mrs. Clark had a quick eye and a skillful hand—that talent for cutting, contriving and “making over” which amounts to genius in some

women. Her own children always looked nicely, albeit they were dressed on "next to nothing," as she said. They had need of giving their clothing close wearing, but no one ever saw them with a garment of one kind and a patch of another. If Willie's coat needed mending, and she had no pieces like it, coat and pieces both were colored, and so made uniform; if Annie's dress must be lengthened out, a neatly-contrived tuck concealed the seam. She had more than once remarked that her "fingers fairly ached to get hold of those young Creslys and fix them up a little." So, instead of sending patterns, she went over herself, and entered into the work with animation, planned, contrived, cut out, and finally offered to come for an afternoon or two and help make up the garments. She never guessed how Sam watched her, admiring her busy cheerfulness, those evenings he was at home, but she knew Mrs. Cresley was glad of her help, and she was too well pleased with her own work not to feel satisfied.

Susie had watched the packing and sending off the flower-frames with something like regret.

"They're so pretty! How nice they'll look with flowers and vines growing all over 'em, won't they?" she said. "Oh, I wish I had some!"

“Pshaw! what would you do with ’em?” answered Sam, rather roughly. He was thinking of the beautiful garden where those he had made would be put up.

“Why, I’d put it in the yard and get a vine or something to grow round it. Mis’ Gray’d give me something, I just know she would,” said the little girl, coaxingly. “You’ve got some pieces left that’s all cut out, Sam; they’d do. Do make me one.”

Sam was gathering up the pieces from his bench; he had material enough, as she had said, and, as far as the work was concerned, he liked that.

“Well, I might make one, I s’pose, but I don’t know any good it’ll do,” he answered, slowly.

Susie accepted the words as a promise, however, and was so joyous over it that there was nothing left for him but to go to work. The frame was accordingly made, and coming home from work the evening after its completion, he found it duly established in the yard through the united efforts of Ted and Susie. The little girl had been to Mrs. Gray, too, and, as she had predicted, had met with ready success.

“Many vines are slow in growing, and you wouldn’t want to wait long, I suppose,” the old lady had said, with a sympathizing remembrance

of childish impatience. "You want something that will look pretty this summer. I will see if my cypress has come up; if it has, you shall have some of that."

The delicate green leaves were already up, and Susie carried her treasures home in triumph, and she and Teddy proceeded to plant them as Mrs. Gray had directed.

"It looks nice," said Susie as they stood off to admire their work.

"The rest of the yard don't, though," said Teddy, rather discontentedly. His ambition had been suddenly awakened by the pretty garden they had visited.

Susie looked around her, and was forced to admit that their one ornament was somewhat out of keeping with its surroundings. "We might clean up," she suggested, a little timidly.

"Let's," said Teddy. "It'll be as much fun as makin' old baby-houses, anyhow, and that's all girls ever want to play."

They went to work energetically. Teddy borrowed a rake and the little girl possessed herself of a broom. Sticks, rags and bits of paper were carefully swept and gathered up, and various articles—some boards, a hoopless wash-tub and an

old saw-horse—were carried around to the back of the house, and the little front yard was at length brought to an appearance of neatness and order that they had never seen it wear before. It struck Sam's astonished eyes, that evening when he came home from work, almost as though it had been some miracle. He paused at the gate and stood quite still, looking about him. Something very like tears came to his eyes and a strange choking to his throat for a moment. He could not think what brought it—what new thing was coming over him, as well as over the place—and he walked slowly up the narrow path to the house. The tired but happy children found their work thoroughly appreciated by him, at least, and were surprised, in their turn, to find that Sam cared about and was pleased by such a thing. He showed them that he was. It was possible that they might do something toward making that house like a home, and he talked more with them that evening than they could remember his ever having done at one time before. His life had made him silent, reticent and moody enough, poor fellow! and in his oftentimes bitter thinking he had grown little accustomed to pleasant talking.

After supper he went out to the yard again, and

sat down there—"because it looked nice," he said. The children followed him.

"Oh, you ought to see Mis' Gray's yard!" said Susie, with a burst of admiration at the memory. "She's got such handsome flowers—them that ain't vines—all growing in beds; they're red, blue an' white—oh, so pretty!"

"Why don't you and Ted make a bed too? I s'pose, likely, she'd give you some of 'em to put in it," said Sam, entering into the spirit of improvement himself.

Teddy caught at the suggestion.

"Anyhow, I know where there's lots of wild flowers as pretty as any folks' garden; I could get them," he said.

Susie's cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling.

"We'll do it to-morrow, won't we, Ted? Couldn't you show us where to make the beds, Sam?"

So the elder brother went to work with them and marked out the place. Verily, there had been a great clearing away of weeds and rubbish that day in other places than the little yard—a planting of flowers in richer soil than that of the garden.

CHAPTER VII.

IT will be an ornament to the city, so fine a building," said Mr. Graham as the committee that had waited upon him to secure his aid in the erection of a new church withdrew, gladdened by a liberal donation.

"Yes," answered Dr. Williston, pacing slowly to and fro over the velvet carpet and measuring his step from heart to heart of the roses, "it will be a fine building. They will have their beautifully stained windows, their splendid choir, grand organ and eloquent minister; then they will sit comfortably back in their cushioned pews and listen, and what good will it do?"

Mr. Graham laughed :

"You must not judge the effect upon others by its having so little upon you, doctor. The most of mankind are more impressible."

"Impressible? That's just the word! that's all there is of it!" exclaimed the doctor. "They enjoy the good music and fine sermon, and because they do, and go regularly to listen to it, they call

themselves Christians. Once outside the church doors, it would be hard to tell how they differ from others, and in what their lives are better than yours or mine. Talk about living for a better world! Why, they are just as anxious to get all they can, and hold on to all they get, in this world, as the rest of us. And as for loving their neighbors as themselves— Humph!”

Mr. Graham often heard such remarks carelessly, neither shocked nor pained, but now he glanced a little uneasily toward Kent, who sat by an opposite window with a book in his hand, and wished, though he scarcely knew why, that Dr. Williston had not spoken so before the boy.

But the doctor was on a theme where he always found enough to say, and pursued his subject quite unconscious of his listener's feelings.

“If they really believed what they profess, do you suppose so many of them would be content to live so that it is almost impossible to tell which side they belong to, satisfied if they can squeeze their own souls into heaven at last, without caring what becomes of any one else? I tell you, Graham, such Christianity is—”

A portrait hung upon the wall where the light fell upon it—a fair, sweet, womanly face. Mr.

Graham's glance rested upon it for an instant, and something in the beautiful eyes made him interrupt the speaker.

"Ah, well, doctor, there is truth enough—too much, indeed—in what you say. But, after all, if these people are no better than we, neither are we better than they, and I never feel quite comfortable in blaming others for not doing anything well until I am ready to take hold myself and prove that I can do it better. Then, too, however many counterfeits of Christianity there may be in the world, there is that which is genuine. I know, for I have seen it—pure, tried gold."

There was the faintest perceptible tremor in his voice as he spoke the last words, and his eyes just swept the picture for an instant as he turned them away from his guest—only an instant, and he looked back smiling and calm as ever.

The doctor had followed and comprehended that brief glance, and though he gave no sign of having done so, he quietly changed the conversation to other topics.

'There had been nothing new, original or particularly forcible in what the doctor had said, and he himself had forgotten it an hour afterward. It was only the old weapon leveled at the Church

again and again, the old cry taken up so often, yet Kent Graham's young heart was somewhat wounded, a little discouraged, by it. How could any one, even the best, walk always with a firm, unfaltering step in the right path? And if he did not—if he stumbled or turned aside—the religion he professed would be called worthless, and the cause he loved would suffer. He was thinking about it during all his ride out to Clannyford.

“There is so much expected of Christians, isn't there, Aunt Gray?” he said as he sat near the old lady that evening, something of his troubled feeling stealing into his tone.

She smiled:

“Expected by whom, Kent?—the world, themselves or God?”

“By the world. I don't see how any one can expect much from himself, and God does not expect, he *knows*.” The boy said the last words as if there were a sudden thought of comfort in them—those simple words that so often hold a world of comforting, “God knows!”

“True,” Mrs. Gray answered. “It does seem strange sometimes, and hard that when one has acknowledged himself to be a sinner—his best right-

eousness but as filthy rags, utterly unable to save himself, and dependent alone for hope upon the atoning blood that only can wash away guilt—that the world should straightway interpret it that he has confessed himself a saint, and so watch him, commenting scornfully upon all imperfections and failures. They say that Christians make ‘great professions.’ I never knew one who professed to be anything more than a sinner, or to be doing anything more than *trying* to follow the Master.”

“It is hard and unjust,” said Kent.

“Ah, Kent”—Mrs. Gray spoke quickly—“I said *seemed* hard sometimes. After all, it is God’s own ordaining that we are to be judged by our lives, the penitent known to be sincere by his turning for ever away from those things of which he has repented. ‘By their fruits ye shall know them.’ ‘If any man love me, he will keep my words.’ The people of God are to be ‘a city set on a hill;’ the world will not forget this, and we must not.”

There was a few moments’ silence, then Kent said, musingly :

“There are so many things one ought to do.”

Ought to *be*, he meant, perhaps; Mrs. Gray fancied so, but she answered his words as he had spoken them :

“A great many things to be done, but not so many things *one* ought to do. We have each our own peculiar work to do, in our own way, using the individuality God has given us in the position where he has placed us. Of all the millions of lives that have been and are yet to be lived in the world, no two ever have been, or ever will be, alike. We stand each one alone. It is not the best that can be, but *our* best, that is required of us.”

“But it is easy to make a mistake there?” said Kent, half questioningly, half musingly, and still remembering Dr. Williston’s words. “I suppose, aunty, that a great many people think they are doing good work and their best work, when, after all, it is worthless or something worse.”

“That may be. Do you remember what Paul says about the builders?—‘Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.’ ‘Let every man *take heed how he buildeth thereupon.*’ ‘Now if any man build *upon this foundation*, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble.’ ‘Every man’s work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire, for the fire shall try every man’s work, of what sort it is.’”

She paused for a moment, and then added

slowly, "If any man's work shall abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire. The foundation is firm and sure for ever, Kent, and all of real value—'gold, silver and precious stones'—that we may build upon it, but our worthless structures of wood, hay and stubble, dignify them by what name we may, will be swept away at last."

Kent leaned his head upon the window-sill and looked dreamily out toward the rosy western sky, silent for a little while, his thoughts drawn away, as his friend had intended, from the world's judgment to God's. Presently the sound of a step on the graveled walk fell upon his ear, and raising his head, he recognized the approaching figure.

"Sam Cresly!" he said, a little surprise in his tone.

"I suppose he has come to tell me something about my flower-frames, then," Mrs. Gray answered. "I engaged him to make two for me, the same as those he made for your father." She laid down her work and went to the door to meet him.

Sam would not go in, so Kent went out too, carrying in his hand the book that he had been

holding, but certainly not reading. The little item of business concluded, Mrs. Gray went back to the house, while Kent walked slowly down to the gate with the young workman.

"What is that?" asked Sam, glancing at the book.

"Only one of my school-books. I brought two or three of them down with me to look at a little; our academy term begins next week."

A look that had a little tinge of envy in it crossed Sam's face at the words. He took the volume Kent held toward him and turned the leaves eagerly.

"I expect there's a lot here that a fellow would like to know about," he said.

"That depends upon what kind of a fellow he is," Kent answered, laughingly; then he added, honestly, "I don't care about real hard study—that is, I don't really *like* to do it, you know. Of course I want to keep up with my classes, but there are some of the boys who just seem to enjoy it in the same way that I do histories and travels or an interesting story; I like those."

"I don't know much about 'em," said Sam, still scanning the pages before him; "only, this don't look very hard."

"Oh, ho!" responded Kent, gayly. "I have a lot of school books that I don't use now; I'll bring them out to you, and just let you find out for yourself whether they are hard or easy."

Sam laughed too.

"Any way, I s'pose I could find out what they was driving at if I tried hard enough," he said.

"Of course you could; I managed to do that, and— Well, it does pay for the trouble, though it isn't the easiest thing in the world. Never mind; just wait until you have had a trial of it!"

"Most likely I won't be bothered a-trying; you'll forget all about it," answered Sam, with a laugh that he tried to make careless, and with a secret wish at his heart that his words might not prove true.

"No, I'll not," answered Kent, and he did not; when he came next to Clannyford, the books came with him. He was "building better than he knew," just then. There had been something of boyish fun in his offer, and a desire to let Sam discover that a schoolboy's path was not altogether one of roses, and there had also been the thought that if he should like them well enough to study them any, the books might be useful to him. He

did not dream of the earnestness with which Sam really went to work at them—not so much from any love of study for its own sake, for he liked mechanical employments better, but because he thought that the knowledge contained in those volumes would help him, as he phrased it, “to be somebody.” What had been at first but a mere vague wish in the boy’s heart was growing more and more into a strong determination to break away from the old life of passive submission to the chains of ignorance and poverty, and to try, at least, if there might not be something better for him and for his.

“What you goin’ to do, Sammy?” asked his mother as, the first evening after Kent’s gift, he brought out the books and laid them upon the little pine table beside the lamp he had lighted.

“I’m going to try and find out what’s in these that’s worth a feller’s knowing, if I can. They’re school-books, and I’m going to study ’em,” he answered, with a resolute purpose in his tone that gave to his mother’s wild wonder something of admiration too.

“Oh, ho! I wouldn’t!” said Teddy, contemptuously; “it’s lots more fun to go in the woods and hunt snakes, and build dams in the creek, than to

go to school and study reading and mental 'rithmetic. Wish I didn't have to!" he added, pathetically.

Owing to his mother's indifference on the subject and his own want of inclination, and of respectable clothing besides, Teddy's attendance at the village school had neither been so regular nor so long continued as to interfere very seriously with his ideas of pleasure. But lately, since his clothing had assumed a more respectable appearance, Sam had insisted that he should go regularly, and Susie too. Teddy considered it a great grievance. "Sam didn't use to care whether we went or not; it's one of his new notions," he said. Still, as many of these "new notions" had been pleasant ones—the buying him clothes to go with, for instance—and as he had some respect for and a little fear of his elder brother, Teddy submitted to the arrangement, though he did so under protest.

"Catch me studying if I didn't have to!" he exclaimed. "I wish I was big, like you, and needn't go to school."

"You'd just like to live on anyhow, and never know anything or be anybody, all your life, and have everybody look down on you as if you wasn't worth their notice, wouldn't you?" asked Sam,

sharply, forgetting that at Teddy's age he had cared no more for these things than Teddy did now.

"Ho! no, they wouldn't, neither," said the boy, independently. "I'm going to be rich when I'm a man, and I'll just ride in amongst 'em in my splendid carriage with gold wheels, and my two black horses with gold dollars around their necks, and see if they don't notice me. Mebby," said Teddy, reflectively—"mebby I might hire somebody to do my mental 'rithmetic for me, 'cause I know I won't want to do it myself, and Miss Page says it's something we'll all need when we grow up."

Sam had opened his books, and made no answer, but Susie, astonished by the magnificence of Master Ted's intentions, found them rather too much to believe in all at once.

"Carriages don't ever have gold wheels to 'em, and I don't believe you'll be rich enough, anyway," she said, gravely.

"Then I'll have 'em painted yeller, and nobody'll know the difference," replied Teddy, philosophically, knocking his heels against the chair.

Sam had opened his books, and he went to work at them in good earnest. It was the first of many evenings so spent—not unpleasant evenings, either,

for he became more interested in these new friends as he became better acquainted with them. He began to feel some pride in his own progress, too, which, if not rapid, was sure. Kent brought him many books after those first ones, histories and books of travel, sometimes, the reading of which, Sam said, was "not work; it was only fun," but from which, nevertheless, he gained much. Kent saw it with satisfaction, and a little of wonder, too, but then he had never known the want of these things, and could scarcely understand what they were to this boy whose life had been so different.

Meanwhile, things within and without the house had grown more comfortable than they had been for months before. Sam's work was steady, and though he could earn no great amount, there was no one now to waste any part of it in liquor. The money for the flower-frames had provided some new clothing, and Mrs. Clark's skill and kindness had manufactured some wearable articles out of the old. She had contrived, too, in her pleasant, neighborly way, to suggest improvements of various kinds. When she was there mending a jacket for Ted or cutting out a dress for Susie, it was easy to say, without assuming any air of superiority or seeming to notice defects, "What a nice box that

is out in the yard! Why don't you have it papered and brought in to stand in this corner? It would be so handy to keep things in, and look nice besides." Or she could remark carelessly, "I'll tell you what we can do with those two breadths of old calico, Mrs. Cresly—we can make a curtain to hang before that cupboard."

As her advice was coupled with her assistance, her plans were generally carried out, and the effect was plainly visible in the appearance of the place. Mrs. Cresly, too, had been stimulated by her influence into more of thought and care about such matters than she had known for a long time before. She had been pleased by the praise her neighbor bestowed upon the alteration that the children had effected in the yard and by Sam's interest in it, but she scarcely knew how to view these evening studies.

"Sam's takin' a great deal to books lately," she said, a little doubtfully.

"I'd be glad of it, if I was you," answered Mrs. Clark, with an emphatic nod of the head. "He might take to many a worse thing."

Mrs. Cresly assented, with a quick sigh at the memory of what was still so near and fresh that it seemed scarcely possible it could be only a

memory, and Sam pursued his chosen course without remonstrance, though it is doubtful if the feeble, gentle mother would have attempted that if she had thought him wrong instead of right.

Busy with these same books Mrs. Gray found Sam one Sunday when she called to inquire after Susie, who had been kept from her place in Sabbath-school by a bruised foot.

"Reading, are you?" she said, pleasantly.

"Yes'm; it's a history of England," said Sam, answering the question that her eyes seemed to ask, though her words did not.

"That is interesting," she said, slowly.

"I like it pretty well," said Sam. "Anyhow, it's a good thing to know about and find out what the world is like."

"A good thing, but not the best thing," she answered.

Sam looked up at her wonderingly. She smiled:

"All these things are useful and right, but wouldn't it be better for one day in the week—this day—to study about that other world where, after all, we must live so much the longest?"

In her own sweet, gentle way the words were spoken, and without waiting for any reply she

turned and began talking to Susie again. The boy, indeed, had no answer to make. Long after she had gone away he sat with his eyes still fixed upon the book, but without turning a leaf. He was half vexed at the words, which he could not forget, and which in some way interfered with his reading. From many another he would keenly have resented them, as spoken only because "everybody thought they had a right to meddle with poor folks and give 'em all sorts of advice," and they would have aroused only his pride and obstinacy. But from Mrs. Gray it was different. She had never taken any more liberties in their little cottage than she would have done in the best house in the village; had always respected their rights and feelings as individuals without regard to what dress they wore or how poor they were. He knew, too, that what she had said to him she would have said even more quickly to Kent Graham. So, though a feeling of annoyance lingered, he could not be angry, and at last, closing his volume, he pushed it impatiently from him and walked out of doors.

The thought that had been first awakened by Kent's question in the boat, and that had been deepened and strengthened by the solemn, earnest

words he had heard at the funeral, came back now. His life was something to God. The One who gave it cared what he made of it and how he lived it. He knew that now, and the knowledge, though he had scarcely been conscious of it, had given him a new feeling of self-respect and had increased his hopefulness in the efforts he had been making. But that other world of which Mrs. Gray had spoken he had scarcely thought of at all; he had been too busy with this. And yet there, "after all, we must live the longest," she had said. After all the studying, after all the trying to make a happier home, after all the dreams of climbing up to a position of comfort and respect—even if he could succeed in them all—he could, after any effort at advancement, enjoy them but a few years, and "after all" would come that other world of which he knew nothing, where "we must live the longest."

It was not a pleasant thought to him, yet it came back often during the next week. After the day's work, after the evening's study, it came, bringing a vague feeling of dissatisfaction. He could busy and interest himself in repairing the garden gate or dilapidated doorstep, or in the book he had taken up, but when it was finished up rose the haunting sen-

tence—"That other world where, *after all*, we must live the longest."

Perhaps it was because of that, though I think he himself scarcely knew why it was, that when the hour for service came the next Sabbath he followed the little groups that wended their way to the school-house, and passing in, took his seat among the worshipers. It was not a large room, and the only seats were the benches which during the week days many a mischievous knife had marked with rude initials. Pulpit there was none—nothing but a platform with a plain table upon it—yet it all seemed pleasant that quiet Sabbath morning, with the soft breeze stealing in through the open windows, lifting little children's sunny curls from their warm temples, fluttering the mothers' bonnet ribbons, fanning the fathers' heated foreheads and bringing a faint resinous odor from the pines that surrounded the building.

It was a peaceful, restful hour to the pastor who had come away from his city church for a half-day's service in this little nook in the woods. His topic was the old command repeated so often, yet never oftener than the need for it: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where

neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal." There were some careless hearers, as there always are, but Sam, watching the faces of those by whom he was surrounded, felt sure that to some there the "other world" was not a thought of chill and dread, but of rest and peace. He saw it in their glistening eyes and heard it in their voices as they sang:

"Jerusalem, my happy home,
Name ever dear to me!
When shall my labors have an end
In joy and peace and thee?

"When shall these eyes thy heaven-built walls
And pearly gates behold?
Thy bulwarks, with salvation strong,
And streets of shining gold?"

Oh the dear old hymns! how they sing themselves into heart and brain! The boy went away more thoughtful still, and with the words of that song deep in his memory. He was beginning to understand that he wanted something more than home, education and position, but he did not know what. As he was walking homeward down the shady road, Miss Crail, whose quick eyes had no-

ticed his unwonted presence at the morning meeting, joined him.

"I want to ask your help about a plan that I have for our Sabbath-school," she said. "Don't you think that some of the older boys would come and form themselves into a Bible class? The fact is we need their help and influence, and the Bible history and lessons are well worth studying, even for those who are too far advanced for the simple questions and answers of the children."

Bible history! Sam colored slightly, and wondered if Mrs. Gray had been telling her about her visit, and how she had found him engaged the previous Sunday. But the lady's pleasant glance, meeting his so frankly, dispelled the suspicion.

"Wouldn't you like it? Don't you think you could get some others to come?" she asked.

"I don't know; mebbly I might," Sam answered slowly and rather doubtfully. But Miss Crail, without seeming to notice his hesitation, construed his words into consent, and responded brightly:

"Thank you! I shall expect you, then, and there will some others come too, I know. I am very glad."

After that, though Sam did not much like the

idea of going, he could not make up his mind to stay away and disappoint the lady who had asked him in a manner that gratified his growing manliness and self-respect, and who seemed to consider that he had promised.

11



CHAPTER VIII.

AUTUMN had come. The lilies and roses in Mrs. Gray's garden had given place to crimson dahlias and golden and white chrysanthemums, and even these were beginning to curl their leaves and look draggled and forlorn under the touch of the early frost. Housekeepers and their brooms were waging brisk war with the falling leaves for possession of the garden walks, while the forest paths, where no broom came, were fast being covered with brightly-colored leaves and some that were brown and dry, and rustled as little Dan's bare feet passed through them. Schoolgirls going homeward carried handfuls of golden-rod from the river side, and Teddy Cresly and the little frisky gray squirrels kept bright-eyed watch of the trees where they knew the nuts were ripening.

Mrs. Cresly shivered a little at the chilly nights and mornings, and wondered helplessly how they were "goin' to get along through the winter," while, across the street, Mrs. Clark, whose forte was doing instead of doubting, was cheerily overlooking the

worsted garments worn by her little flock the previous winter, and planning for their remodeling. In Miss Crail's kitchen good old Hannah, putting away her stores of dried corn, canned fruits and jars of preserves, surveyed them with mingled satisfaction and thankfulness, and said, as she turned her dark face toward the mistress,

"How nice all de seasons fit into each oder! What's dat de Bible says, honey?—'While de earth remains, seed-time an' harves', cold an' heat, summer an' winter, day an' night, shall not cease'—not cease, bress God!"

To the world of traffic and trade this autumn did not come as brightly as was autumn's wont. "Business is dull," said the merchants, leaning over their counters. "Money is tight," remarked the owners of well-filled pocket-books, grasping them so closely as to prove their assertion, while they refused to invest in the countless schemes urged upon them. "Times are hard," groaned the fathers of families, looking worn and anxious, and the familiar little word "economize" was heard on all sides.

A cloud rested over Graham's mills. Various rumors were afloat among the workmen, and after working-hours they gathered in little groups to

discuss chances and probabilities. Mr. Crail had been cautiously questioned by some, and though but little had been elicited from his reticence, that little was not very hopeful. Mr. Graham had visited the factory and held a long conversation with Mr. Crail in that gentleman's office, and a boy who had been sent in with some message to the superintendent reported that he had overheard the words "won't pay" and "shut down," though, of course, he "didn't know what they were talking about."

All such little items were commented upon and surmised over by the men. Various signs and indications, trivial in themselves, but amounting to much in the aggregate, had been noted by careful eyes, until what had been at first a vague fear had grown to an almost settled expectation. The men came to their work with anxious faces, at once waiting for and dreading the tidings that they felt must come.

It was all exchanged for certainty one dreary, cloudy evening after the great bell had sounded its peal. Mr. Crail came into the long room, and something in his face made the eyes there turn upon him with a questioning look. It was not easy, even for him, cool and calm as he usually

was, to meet those glances and say what he had come to say—not easy, though he knew that they guessed his message.

“I haven’t the best news for you to-night, my men,” he said. “The mill must stop. Times are terribly dull just now; there’s not a cent to be made, and money would be lost by running any longer, and Mr. Graham has decided to close up for a while. I’m sorry, but there will be no work after this week.”

A low murmur ran through the crowd, but no one spoke for a moment; then Mr. Crail, glancing at the faces around him, added:

“I don’t think this will last very long. We shall probably start up again—in March, anyway, I hope—and, of course, old hands will have the preference.”

Slowly they passed down the worn stairs and out into the open air, separating into little groups of two and three as they walked homeward. Some of the younger, more hopeful ones said, cheerily, “Well, we shall have to be traveling, and hunt up work somewhere else.” Others said nothing at all, silent in their thoughtfulness. They had families to support, and only their daily work to bring daily food, clothing and comfort. Four

months until March! It looked hopelessly far away. What should they do in the mean time? was the question they were trying to answer.

“Oh dear, Sammy! what be we a-goin’ to do?” exclaimed Mrs. Cresly, in dreary despondency, when Sam carried home the word.

The boy had no reply to make, and much of the old despairing bitterness came back to his heart again as he seated himself in the doorway and leaned his head upon his hand. He had been trying so hard to make things better and brighter for them all, and now it must come to nothing at last. What could he do? He was but a boy, and it was doubtful if he could find work elsewhere in these dull times, and even if he did, he could do but little more than support himself away from home. What would become of them all?

Tim Nolan also carried home the tidings—home to Maggie’s tidy little kitchen—and told her with as hopeful a face and brave a heart as he could command. They had discussed the probability of the event before, and now that it had come, Tim said:

“Misther Crail tould us they’d be startin’ in March, but it’s long waitin’ till that time for the likes of us, Maggie! Still, I’m thinkin’ we’ll not

lave the bit of a house an' garden that's so nate an' convanient an' move off intirely. It's better ye stays here wid the childer, an' I'll go by mesilf, jist, an' hunt work till sich times as the fathory starts ag'in."

Maggie looked up with an anxious, shadowed face, despite her effort at a smile. If the mill were to start again in the spring, it did indeed seem best to keep their home and have Tim go back to his old place; it was doubtful if he could find as steady employment elsewhere. But those intervening four months! Maggie's heart failed as she thought of them. Her strongly tempted, easily yielding Tim, what would he do in those days of looking about for a place? And if he found one—in a city, perhaps—how long would he keep it or his good resolutions, away from his home and its influences, surrounded by drinking companions and with temptation on every side? Where would he be before the four months were gone? No possible hardships, privations, or even starvation for herself and children, were so much to be feared as ruin for him. She had all along been hoping against hope that Tim's prophecies concerning the stopping of the mill would not be verified, and now that it had come, and she realized all that it

involved, she covered her face and burst into a passionate fit of weeping.

Many other village homes there were where sober conclave was held that night, and to which the events of the day had brought cause for anxious thought and careful planning.

Kent Graham had heard nothing of the proposed suspension of the works—not even that such a thing was thought of. Mr. Graham had not thought to mention the matter, and indeed it had not occurred to him that his boy would feel any interest in such a mere business item. So when at breakfast a letter from Mr. Crail was handed him, stating that the amount of work they had decided upon was completed, and that the announcement had been made to the employés the evening before, he glanced carelessly over the page and remarked:

“Ah! the factory stops next week! I did not suppose they would get through quite so soon.”

“The factory, father?” said Kent, setting down his coffee-cup in astonishment. “Yours? at Clannyford?”

“Certainly; whose else should it be?” smiling. “Why, haven’t you heard anything about it before? I don’t know as you have, though; very likely I have never thought to mention it.”

“And why is it going to stop? for how long?” Kent asked, quickly.

“I cannot say exactly how long—that will depend upon circumstances—but until some time next spring, I suppose. As for the reason— Why, Kent, you ought to know that yourself. A promising business-man you will make!” answered Mr. Graham, laughing.

“Because of dull times?” said Kent. He knew that was the general complaint, repeated on all sides, but it had not meant much to him hitherto—nothing that affected his own life in any way. “Yes, I have heard enough about ‘hard times’ and business being dull, but I never thought of its affecting the factory.”

“It affects it so much as this: I should make nothing running this winter—should lose, in fact. Mr. Crail and I discussed the matter thoroughly, and decided that it was best to stop for the present.”

Mr. Graham sipped his coffee and broke open another letter. Kent sat silent and thoughtful. To his father this was only the discharging of so many hands not needed; to Kent it was friends in trouble. He knew more about those Clannyford homes, who the people were and how they lived.

He had grown so interested in Sam Cresly, trying in his own way to help him, and what would the poor fellow do now? Tim Nolan, too—he would spend his idle days at Favisham's, most likely, where many of the others would go, and so make the hard times harder. Maggie's troubled face rose before him, and the little twin girls looking solemn for sympathy. There was the Scotchman Blane, and his sick wife, and Mrs. Clark, who was so pleased when her oldest boy got a place in the mill; she would feel sad and disappointed now. How sorry for them all Aunt Gray would be!

Clannyford was a large part of Kent Graham's world, he had been there so much. He had grown more thoughtful for others, too, of late, and knowing the gloom and depression that this event would cause, he could not but be troubled. It hung over him like a cloud all the day, darkening his happy sunshine and taking the enjoyment out of every plan and pleasure; the thought of those whom he had learned to care for there haunted him constantly.

“Why, Kent,” said his father as, late in the afternoon, he watched him taking up one book after another, and finally throwing them all aside to look idly out of the window, “what is the

matter with you to-day? You look as sober as if you had lost a fortune or a place by the mill's stopping."

"Father," said Kent, turning toward him suddenly, "do you know how much it would cost—I mean, how much you would lose by keeping the mill running this winter?"

"Certainly; I made that calculation, of course, before I decided to stop."

"And couldn't you afford to do it?"

"Afford to? That is rather an odd question, is it not? I could afford to spend the money for that, or to throw it away in some other manner, I suppose, but that does not at all prove that it would be sensible to do so. If obliged to lose it, the sum is not so large that I should feel its loss very seriously, if that is what you mean."

"That is what I meant."

"And suppose I should not, what then?" Mr. Graham asked a little curiously.

Kent did not answer the question directly, but only said:

"I am sorry for all those poor Clannyford people that are out of work; it will be very hard for some of them."

"Is that what has been troubling you? Oh,

they will do well enough, no doubt. Clannyford mill is not the only one in the world, you know."

"I know, but, father, their homes are there, and their families. A great many of them haven't anything at all only what they earn in the factory. Aunt Gray has told me about them, and the most of them I know, too. Some of them will be sure to drink when they are not at work."

"That is not much to their credit," interrupted Mr. Graham.

"No, sir, but it makes their being out of work all the worse. Mr. Blane has a sick wife to take care of, and Sam Cresly has his mother, little brother and sister. They have been getting along better lately—since his father died, you know. Sam has been working steadily and fixing up the place some, too, and he has sent Ted and Susie to school. Aunt Gray thinks he has improved in a great many ways."

"All of which means—what? that you want me to keep the mill running this winter, since it would not be likely to ruin me?"

So stated, it did sound like a rather audacious proposition, but Kent answered bravely and honestly :

"Yes, sir."

“That’s a modest request, indeed! I’m afraid that you are getting rather extravagant in your fancies, young gentleman. The loss might not embarrass me, to be sure, but still, it is too large a sum to throw away.”

“But it would not be thrown away if these others had the benefit,” pleaded Kent.

“Had the benefit! Well, suppose they did, what are all these people to you, that you are so deeply interested in them and so anxious to help them?” Mr. Graham asked, watching the boy’s earnest face.

“Why”—Kent was a little confused by the unexpected question—“I have been there so much that I know them all, and like them—the most of them—and so I can’t help being sorry when they are in trouble. I’d do anything I could to help them, because it is pleasant to do it, and because—” Kent hesitated.

“Because what?” persisted Mr. Graham, but pleasantly. “I don’t want any half reasons.”

“Because it is right.” The boy’s voice sank lower, and faltered a little. “Because helping others is working for God, and mother prayed that I might work for him ‘anywhere—everywhere.’”

Kent’s blue eyes had grown tearful, but over the

father's darker ones the lids suddenly dropped, and hid them for a moment. The hand that had been carelessly playing with a gold pencil-case trembled and let it fall, and found it not quite easy to pick it up again. There was a brief silence; then Mr. Graham made an effort to speak playfully, though his tones were not quite steady:

"Ah, well, Kent, I have spoiled you too long, I suspect, to commence doing anything else now. You may have your way about this."

"About running the mill? Oh, father, will you?" Kent started to his feet.

"Yes; I will send Mr. Crail word. This is Saturday, and it is so late that they will have stopped work by this time, I suppose"—glancing at his watch—"but I will send out word on Monday."

"Oh, I wish they could know to-night!" said the boy, eagerly; "they would be so glad about it all day to-morrow. Lio would carry me out in a hurry, and I could easily be back by eight o'clock. It is moonlight, too, you know; let me go, father."

"What an impatient fellow! Off with you, then!" and Kent waited for no second bidding.

The father looked after him, and as the door closed behind him he murmured to himself, warm tears filling his eyes: "He is Helen's own boy! It is just what she would have been sure to ask, my pure, noble darling!" and the stately head was bowed upon the study-table with something very like a sob.

Lio sped away on his journey as though his young master's light heart had made him an unusually light load. It had been a pleasant afternoon, and it was fading into a pleasant evening. The sun sinking low in the cloudless sky flooded the earth with that mellow, golden light peculiar to some autumn days, and even the half-dismantled trees looked cheerful in its glow, but grayest sky and dullest landscape would scarcely have seemed dreary to the young traveler then as he flew along the road. Reaching Clannyford, he went directly to Mr. Crail's house, but that gentleman was not there.

"He has not come from the mill yet," Miss Crail said.

Kent turned his horse's head in the direction of the factory. The great building was silent and the operatives all gone, but Mr. Crail was in his office, where the arranging of some books had de-

tained him. Kent sought him there, and delivered his message.

The superintendent looked surprised, but not ill pleased.

"I am glad of it! glad of it!" he said heartily. "It's a kind thing to do, anyway, and I felt sorry for some of the men yesterday. Kells," as the night watchman employed for years about the place came into the room—"Kells, we shall not stop, after all. Mr. Graham has just sent me word that he has decided to run the mill this winter."

"That's good news," said the old man, a smile lighting up his grim face. "I wish all the hands knew it; some of 'em would rest better to-night."

"I wish they did too," answered Mr. Crail. "I shall tell those I see, and then I suppose I shall have the rest coming, one at a time, to-morrow, to find out whether it is true."

"I'll tell you what you might do, sir," said Kells—"ring the bell. That would soon bring them together, to see what was up."

Mr. Crail laughed.

"That's an idea! You go and pull the bell-rope, Kells, and we will soon spread the news."

Kells hurried away, and Mr. Crail opened wide his office window.

“Now come and watch, Kent.”

Clear and strong the peal of the bell rang out on the still air, and startled the quiet village. Instantly heads were thrust out of the windows and people rushed to the doors to listen. “What does that mean?” each asked of his neighbor, and no one could answer. Newspapers were dropped, babies hastily put down and supper-tables deserted without ceremony, while the men rushed away toward the factory, followed by a troop of boys and girls, all anxious to find out what was going on.

A great crowd gathered outside the building. “Holloa! What’s up? Factory on fire? What’s the matter? What’s wrong?” sounded on every side.

“Keep still, all of you!” shouted Kells; “Mr. Crail has something to say to you.”

The superintendent, standing at his window, raised his hand to command silence.

“There is nothing wrong, my men. I have some news that I thought you would all like to hear.” Mr. Crail’s voice had a pleasanter, more cordial tone than was its wont. “Mr. Graham has

concluded to keep the mill running this winter, and you can all come to work as usual on Monday morning."

A low murmur ran through the throng. "What's that?" "What is it he says?" called a few from the outside who had not caught the words distinctly. The answer was given instantly from different sides—"Going to be no stop." "Work all winter."

"Three cheers for Mr. Graham, boys!" called a deep voice with a touch of grateful feeling in it, and the cheers rang out loud, long and hearty.

"Three more for Mr. Crail and the Clannyford mills!" cried another, and again the voices filled the air until the whole village heard, while hats and caps were waved, and some sunbonnets by the little girls on the outskirts of the crowd, who fully appreciated the noise if not the news.

Then the throng dispersed slowly, talking and laughing with each other as they walked homeward. Mr. Crail withdrew from his window with a laugh:

"Quite a jubilee, wasn't it? Well, I'll put up my books now and go home."

Kent waited a few moments for him.

"I'd like to know, Kent," he said, glancing a little curiously at the boy as he locked his office

door and dropped the key into his pocket, "whether this was your father's notion or yours?"

"It wouldn't have been much use to be mine if it hadn't been his too," said Kent, laughing, but Mr. Crail was answered. He was silent, unusually silent even for him, as they walked up the street, but once or twice, on turning toward him, Kent caught his eyes scanning him with a peculiar glance that made him wonder a little.

"Not coming in?" said Mr. Crail, at last, as he reached his own door and Kent declined entering. "You had better."

"No, sir, thank you. I promised to be at home by eight."

Mr. Crail watched him as he rode away, and said to himself as he entered the house, "It was his own plan, I know it was! All of a piece with that Tim Nolan nonsense."

Kent paused just a moment at Aunt Gray's for greeting and good-bye—long enough to hear her pleasant voice say:

"I have heard what good news you brought; some one passing by told me. I am very glad."

Then he mounted once more, patted Lio's glossy neck and started gayly homeward. The moon came up before he had finished his journey, and

kept him company with the light of her fair, round face, which, with the clear, chill air, made the ride delightful. The lamps were lighted when he reached home, and he found his father, in dressing-gown and slippers, enjoying his paper in the glow of a cheerful fire that had been kindled in the library. He looked up with a smile, though with a face that was a little sadder than its wont, perhaps—at least Kent fancied so for the moment before he spoke so cheerfully:

“Ah! back already?”

“Yes, sir; it’s eight, isn’t it?”

“Nearly”—drawing out his watch—“but I hardly supposed you could get back as soon as you thought. Well, you saw Mr. Crail?”

“I saw him at the office. Oh, it was splendid!” said Kent, his face still flushed from his ride and his eyes sparkling. “I wish you had been there;” and throwing himself down on a low seat by the fire, he told how the message had been delivered and described the scene.

Mr. Graham leaned back in his chair and listened, smiling, though he said but little. But even while he smiled and listened a strange fancy clung to him of a light hand on his arm and a voice sounding more distinctly even than Kent’s—a sweet

voice, speaking words he had heard it utter long ago when urging some plan of benevolence: "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me."

He roused himself, as the boy concluded his recital, to say,

"And now you are satisfied, I suppose?"

"Are you, sir?" asked Kent, roguishly.

"I am satisfied that somebody below stairs is thinking anything but approvingly of your style of keeping tea waiting; you had better go and look after it."

The cloud so quickly rolled away, Clannyford resumed its old, busy life.

"I told you it would all come out right, Johnny, and it has," said Mrs. Clark to her son that night as she bustled about cheerily, preparing a second edition of the supper that had grown cold by his running away and leaving it. Maggie Nolan smiled brightly at Tim's assurance that "all the frettin' had been for nothin', intirely."

Sam Cresly walked homeward relieved of the weight that had been pressing upon his heart for so many weary hours. Teddy was there before him, telling the story in his own way:

"Oh, it was jolly! And then some feller said,

‘‘Rah for Mr. Graham,’ and us fellers all ‘rahed and ‘rahed, and for Mr. Crail and everybody. My throat’s sore, and say, mother, I didn’t half eat my supper, so I didn’t; where’s the rest of it? ‘Twas lots of fun, I tell you!’

‘‘Something better than fun, I’m thinking,’’ commented Sam. ‘‘We’re to go back to work on Monday, mother.’’

‘‘It’s a good thing for us, I’m sure, Sammy; I didn’t know what we was a-goin’ to do. I wonder what made Mr. Graham change his mind all of a sudden, so?’’

Sam had been wondering that too, linked with other thoughts that he did not care to tell—of the last Sabbath’s Bible lesson; the long talk about God’s ‘‘whatsoever,’’ and what was meant by it in the passage they had read: ‘‘Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.’’ He was thinking of the brief prayer, the first that had ever crossed his lips, put up the night before—less in faith than in desperation, indeed, because he did not know what else to do—and wondering if it were possible that the blessing which had come to-night was in answer to that. Not quite willing to believe and not quite able to disbelieve it, the thought lingered in his heart,

bringing a strange feeling of mingled dread, awe and thankfulness.

"I hope there won't any of the men take it out in a reg'lar spree to-night when they go up to Favisham's for groceries," he said as he took up his books—the books he had had no heart to touch last night.

"Oh dear! I hope not!" answered Mrs. Cresly.

"I know where there's an old tar barrel in Mr. Crail's shed," remarked Teddy. "I'm goin' to ask Miss Crail for it, and get the boys, and have a rousin' bonfire. Tar barrels is better'n whisky barrels any day."

A sentiment in which Miss Crail agreed, so the Clannyford boys had a bonfire that night.



CHAPTER IX.

THROUGH the quiet forest paths, over the dry and rustling leaves, under the great old trees, through whose leafless branches the sunshine fell, little Dan passed on his homeward way one Sabbath afternoon. It was a long walk to the village Sunday-school, but not so long as those he was obliged to take on other days for a less agreeable purpose.

He liked the notice and the kindness bestowed upon him. He liked the comfortable dinner which he was sure to have with either Mrs. Gray or Miss Crail, and the being dressed in neat, nice clothing. Mrs. Gray, though she had replaced the miserable rags in which he first appeared with articles whole and more comfortable, soon discovered that if she would secure his constant attendance, and ensure his presenting a respectable appearance at the school, she must provide a suit for that especial purpose and have him come to her house to array himself in it. It was an arrangement by no means disagreeable to the little fellow, for he liked anything

that took him there, and Mrs. Gray's gentle, helpful touch and always sweet voice were new and strange in his rude, wandering life. He liked being in the pleasant schoolroom, and seeing so many other children about him, so long as he was under such protection that they could neither tease nor annoy him, and he enjoyed, after his own fashion, the stories and the singing, though not always very clearly comprehending either. He was away from Sime too for the time, and that did not at all detract from his comfort.

Peacefully, almost solemnly, still the wood seemed that day, so many of the blithe summer sounds were gone. The birds had all departed and only an occasional squirrel frisked along, wrapped in his coat of fur, yet the sunlight, so bright and warm, made the afternoon seem like a lingering glance of summer flashed in among the autumn days. Little Dan's feet loitered sadly, making a detour first in one direction, then in another, to examine every trivial object that caught his wandering eyes. He stopped to rest two or three times, stretching himself upon the trunk of some fallen tree, and lying idly with half-closed eyes, not so much from any feeling of weariness as because the solitude and the soft sunshine were pleasant and

the place to which he was going not particularly attractive. Now and then he surveyed somewhat longingly the large, rosy apple he carried, but he did not taste it. That and three or four of its fellows that swelled his pockets had been given him, and he had stowed them away for a peace-offering at home; without something of the kind it was not quite safe to present himself there after so long an absence.

Slowly as he walked, the hut came in sight at last, with the smoke curling up from its rude chimney. Moll was sitting outside, dirty and forlorn as usual, weaving her willow baskets in a listless, lazy way. She looked up as the child approached, but her glance had in it neither pleasure nor the reverse, neither welcome nor question—nothing at all. Poor Moll's eyes never did anything but *see*, and not so very much of that.

“It's me,” said Dan, as if she might not be quite sure of the fact, throwing himself down upon the ground.

Sime came to the door, and seeing him, pounced upon the apple at once. “Here, gimme that!” he said, snatching it out of his hand.

Inside the hut the old black kettle was swung over the fire, and “maum” was stewing the unin-

viting medley that was to serve for supper. She came out when she heard Dan's voice.

"What did ye bring?" she demanded.

He drew out the apples, one by one, and then, as her outstretched hand seemed to be waiting for something more, he added two small ginger cakes that he had secretly hoped to keep.

"Nothin' more'n that?" she asked.

"No," answered Dan.

She turned away, muttering something to herself, and evidently not very well satisfied, as she re-entered the hut and flung the child's treasures down among the pieces of broken bread and meat that were lying on a wooden bench.

Sime munched his apple greedily, eying Dan the while, and by the time he had swallowed the last mouthful, he had discovered something else that he wanted.

"Where'd ye git that 'ere cap?"

"Mis' Gray gimme it 'cause t'other was all ragged," answered Dan.

"Lemme see it," drawled Sime.

But Dan put both hands to his head and held fast to the cap, which, though rather too large for him, was a decided improvement upon the tattered affair that it had superseded. A sudden

sharp blow on the knuckles from a stick in the hands of the older boy made the little brown fingers quickly relinquish their grasp, however, and Sime, snatching the cap, placed it upon his own head. It was a trifle small, but it would answer his purpose.

“I’ll have this ’ere myself,” he remarked, and throwing his own old torn hat to Dan, he walked away.

The little fellow viewed the miserable exchange he had been forced to make rather disconsolately, but he offered no further resistance, neither, after the one exclamation of pain caused by the blow, did he cry. Such incidents were of too frequent occurrence for that; he neither looked for nor expected anything else. He only rubbed his still smarting fingers, looked after Sime’s retreating figure, and then, with a little sigh, resigned himself to the situation, and replacing his cap with Sime’s old hat, fell to thinking of other matters. He leaned back against a tree and after gazing around him, turned to watch Moll’s slow-moving fingers for a little while. He did not dislike to be near the girl, for though she made no attempt at showing him kindness, she was the only one about the place from whom he never received blows or

abuse ; she was at least unaggressive and indolently tolerant.

“Moll,” he said, at last, breaking the silence.

“Hey?” responded the girl, without looking up.

“They told us in that school ’bout a man that was rich—had a big house, had gardens, an’ trees, an’ folks, an’ horses. There was poor folks that hadn’t got nothin’, an’ he didn’t like ’em, an’ went to kill their babies. I was a baby one time,” said Dan, pausing to remember the explanation that had been given him. “One man took his baby an’ put it into a basket, put pitch on all over, so it wouldn’t leak, an’ stuck it out in the river. A woman found it. She had things like the rich man—houses an’ gardens ; she let the baby live in her house, an’ have clo’es an’ good dinners, till he growed up.”

The child was still a few moments, with some fancy running through his ignorant childish brain of how it would seem to live always in a house like Mrs. Gray’s, with such pleasure and comfort constantly about him as he enjoyed in those bright, brief Sabbath hours.

“I dunno,” he continued, more to himself than to his companion, however ; “if I made a big willer basket an’ got into the river in it, would she

find me, an' give me a house to live in, an' nice things?"

"Ye'd get drowned," said Moll, indifferently, picking up a piece of willow.

"Mis' Gray said God kept the baby from gettin' drowned," said Dan, reflectively. "Moll," he added, lying flat on the ground and looking up into the clear sky with brightening eyes, "way up yonder there's houses, pretty flowers an' gold streets all ready for folks that go there. Ye don't have to beg 'em, nor buy 'em, nor nothin'."

"Hey?" ejaculated Moll, uncomprehendingly.

"Won't never be cold or hungry; won't nobody ever hurt ye. He'll take care of ye all the while," pursued the child, evidently more intent on thinking over what had been told him than with any idea of communicating it to another or thought of another's listening. The girl scarcely seemed to listen, at least she betrayed no interest as she continued her work in the old languid, listless way, hardly raising her eyes to glance about her.

The sun sank lower and lower, and the rosy light faded away from the western sky while the childish eyes watched it. As the shadows began to gather, gloomy and dark, a wagon came rumbling up one of the old forest roads—an old road

so seldom traveled now that the grasses had grown over it and the long branches of the trees almost met above it in some places. The rude conveyance, passing slowly along, seemed to accord well with the route it traveled in point of antiquity and neglect, so worn, dilapidated and creaking it was, and the poor gaunt animal that drew it needed no voice to tell of hard usage and meagre fare. The driver, a man whose straight black hair and tawny face were only half visible under the slouched hat he wore, drew up as the wagon emerged into the small open space near the hut and dismounted, fastening his horse to a tree—a most unnecessary precaution, as the poor animal did not manifest the least inclination to travel any farther.

The sound of the approaching wheels had brought Sime from the woods and maum from the hut, and both approached the wagon.

“What ye got, Bill?” questioned the woman of the driver of the wagon.

“See, can’t ye?” responded the man, surlily, giving the horse a parting kick and leaning back against a tree.

Sime’s long fingers had already been busying themselves in lifting the ragged blanket that concealed the contents of the wagon, and he soon

brought to view all there was—a few potatoes and turnips and a pair of fowls.

“Them all?” demanded the woman, looking from the small load to Bill.

“Can’t ye see?” repeated Bill. Then he muttered in a lower tone something in which he appeared to be venting his dissatisfaction equally upon his “ill luck” and his questioner.

“Humph!” ejaculated maum, with a touch of contempt in her tone, and pushing the potatoes aside, she caught up the fowls and walked into the house.

“Fetch them ’ere in, you!” said the man, glancing angrily at Sime and pointing to the vegetables.

It was an order that by no means suited Sime’s indolence, but the one who gave it was larger and stronger than himself, and in his present mood not safe to provoke, so he prudently though sullenly obeyed.

The man walked into the house, and maum presently depositing the kettle of supper upon the ground—floor there was none—the party gathered eagerly and hurriedly around it, all but little Dan. He advanced more timidly, partly, perhaps, because having had one comfortable meal at Mrs. Gray’s that

day made this appear less inviting, but more because he knew from experience that it would be likely to be a dark evening for him. Bill had returned from a three days' expedition through the country with his moodiness and ill-temper at his want of success heightened by the liquor he had drank to console himself for it. Maum was dissatisfied because he had brought so little home and cross because the man was, and at such times the child feared them both and tried to keep out of the way of either. On the present occasion he ensconced himself between Granny and Moll, but he was soon satisfied, and did not linger long.

"Dan's been eatin' nice dinners; he don't want none of oun," drawled Sime as soon as he was willing to stop eating long enough to say anything.

"Been eatin' where?" questioned Bill, ready to take offence at anything or nothing.

"'Mong them Sunday-school folks," answered Sime.

"You sha'n't go there no more," said Bill, turning angrily to the child.

"He'll go more, then," exclaimed Moll, with equal temper. "He gits cold pieces, old clo'es an' apples of 'em, an' ye say he ain't to fetch 'em? He'll go."

“He hain’t begged much from ’em so far,” muttered Bill. “They’ll set him ag’in’ it; it ain’t no use now.”

Maum retorted by a not very flattering estimate of Bill’s own success in the begging and foraging line, and insisted that Dan’s visits to the Sabbath-school should not be interfered with. She knew that they obtained many things because of the interest felt for the child by his friends in the village, and as long as he did not come home empty-handed she was more than willing that he should go to the school, though it is scarcely probable that she would have consented to it but for that.

Dan knew it, and in his sudden terror of losing this one pleasant thing out of his life, he forgot his present fear of those about him, and interposed eagerly :

“They’ll gimme never so many things, maum.”

His remark was cut short by Bill, who turned angrily toward him, and catching him by the arm, showered blows thick and fast about his head, until he broke away from his captor and ran out of doors. Sime laughed, and maum continued her ill-tempered observations without seeming to notice the interruption.

Through it all the old woman sat quietly on her

broken, uncomfortable chair, seeming to take no notice of the wrath, blows or quarreling around her; deaf and blind to it all she might have been, for any sign she gave. Strange thoughts hers must have been, if she thought at all—strange memories of the wild, wandering, vagrant life that had been hers, the scenes, the persons, the sorrows and the sins which had filled up the years through which she had come to this miserable old age.

After a time Bill went out and unhitched the horse, turning him loose to provide for himself as he best could, with very little help from his owners. Then the wagon was drawn into a thicket that partially concealed it, and left to stand there until the supply of provisions giving out should necessitate another trip through the country to sell a few baskets and beg from the various farm-houses.

Outside little Dan sat, gazing up at the starlit sky and vaguely dreaming of what lay beyond it, thinking of the new things of which he had but lately heard, and wishing, as he held his aching head, that some voice would call him to that strange, beautiful land—that some hand would show him the way thither. He shivered a little now and then in the chill night air, but he did

not leave his lonely nook until the last sound of voices had died away in the hut, the grumbling and quarreling stilled by the inmates lying down to sleep. He went softly to the door then, and surveyed the rude apartment as the flickering fire-light revealed it. Satisfied by what he saw, he turned for one farewell glance at the lovely, glittering stars and stole in noiselessly to nestle down in a corner among the rags and straw.

Pain and fear were soon forgotten in the quiet slumber that came as well to him there as to many a more luxurious couch. Once asleep, he dreamed on, untroubled by his rude surroundings, while the gleaming firelight, keeping watch in the rude room, exhibited his innocent, childish face in strange contrast to those older, coarser ones about him that were so marked by years and want, and something worse than either. Poor little waif! looking at him then, one would have thought it easy to prophesy his future: only a wretched, degraded life could lie before him. It seemed a hopeless spot for sowing precious seed, where noxious weeds were springing on every side, where no dew nor sunlight could come, and where the very air was a blight. Yet there were some who prayed for him, and unpromising as all his circumstances and influences

seemed, counted it not labor lost to sow the seed as they might, and leave the rest with Him who sendeth the early and the latter rain.

The other occupants of the hut were all astir when the little sleeper awoke the next morning, and he lay and watched them for a little while before he ventured out. Bill had in part slept off his intoxication and ill-temper, and maum, if not better natured, was at least more silent, than she had been the evening before. Having convinced himself on these important points, Dan crept from his nest and contrived to secure his share of the breakfast.

"You Dan, come along here," said Sime, fastening two or three completed baskets together by a string.

"Where ye goin'?" asked Dan.

"Goin' to town with these 'ere; you've got to go 'long," replied Sime, rolling up an empty bag, not very clean, putting it under his arm and throwing the baskets over Dan's shoulder.

Dan did not quite fancy the prospect, but he made no objections, for that would have been worse than useless, and the two started off together through the wood and out into the country road. The town was fully three miles distant, but

they visited it occasionally, taking now one street and now another, but usually confining themselves to the suburbs and the more quiet streets, away from the crowded thoroughfares where appeals for charity were so constant as to afford them less chance for success. Dan did the most of the work when they were there, for Sime had a fashion of dodging around corners and keeping out of sight outside while he sent the little fellow into the houses to dispose of the willow work or beg. His own long limbs and lounging gait were provocative of suggestions to go to work which he did not care about hearing.

The morning was bright and clear, and Dan, keeping the width of the road between himself and his companion, trudged on, gathering what enjoyment he could from the fresh air and the sunlight. Sime left him to his own meditations until they were fairly in the city limits; then, according to his custom, he paused.

"See here! you go to them houses an' git what ye can. Mind, if they give ye somethin' to eat, ye gimme some," he said warningly. "I'll stay here."

The child obeyed, sauntering along more slowly as soon as the turning of a corner had taken him out of Sime's sight; he was in no hurry to get back

to him. Nearly all the houses in that street were surrounded by yards, and entering one belonging to a pretty, home-like place, he made his way around to a back door and knocked.

"Want any willer baskets?"

"No," answered the servant who opened the door, glancing rather contemptuously at his wares.

"Got any cold pieces or old clo'es to gimme?"

"No; we're almost begged to death now!" responded the girl, shortly, vexed at being called away from her work. "Run along, and shut the gate after you;" and she closed the door and disappeared.

Too much accustomed to such rebuffs to think much about them, the child turned away to try his fortune farther on. The next time it was a little girl, sunny haired and blue eyed, that opened the door to his light rap. She laughed, a pleasant, childlike laugh, as she saw him, and said in answer to his inquiry:

"You are the littlest peddler I ever saw. Come in; I'll ask mamma."

Mamma was also interested in the little figure and the bright black eyes, and after some questions took one of his baskets, paying for it liberally in

bread and meat, which the little girl supplemented by some sweet crackers and two large apples.

"Those are for your ownself," she said.

Out of the cheerful, pleasant room the little wanderer passed, and into the street again. He liked looking in at windows as he passed along, catching glimpses of bright, beautiful homes and groups of happy children at play, but mingling with his admiration there was something of wonder too that he and they should be so unlike. Sometimes they came to the door when he knocked, either to laugh at or pity him, but oftener he heard their merry voices sounding from inner rooms, knowing nothing of his petition or its refusal. Presently, at a large, handsome house standing on the street, he paused in delight before a window filled with beautiful flowers. Blushing roses, delicate, drooping fuchsias, scarlet and white geraniums, were there, all blooming as if winter and frost were things unknown in the world. The little beggar stood and gazed at them with brightening eyes.

A well-dressed gentleman came up the street, and paused as he was about to ascend the steps of the house, watching the child with an amused and interested glance.

"Well, my little fellow?" he said, after a moment's pause.

Dan started.

"Have you fallen in love with the flowers?"

"They're nice," answered the child; "I like 'em."

"So I see. You never saw anything like them before, I fancy," said the gentleman, less as a question than an assertion, drawing his conclusions from the bag and baskets, that told their own story.

"Yes, good many," replied Dan, decidedly, with a remembrance of Mrs. Gray's garden.

"Whew! you have?" said the questioner, laughing, and surveying the little fellow still more critically. "I'd like to know where they came from?"

"God made 'em," answered the child, simply repeating what he had been told, without a thought but that it might be new to the stranger, as it had been to him.

A look of surprise flashed over the gentleman's face.

"Humph! Well, here's a dime for you," dropping the coin into the small brown hand held out to receive it. "I guess you will have to be a gardener some day."

"What's a gardener?" asked Dan, looking a little puzzled.

"You must have a garden of your own some day—a place with plenty of flowers in it."

"I'm goin' to," answered the child, his dark eyes suddenly brightening. "Have house an' gardens an' flowers up there," pointing toward the sky.

Again that expression, partly wonder and partly some deeper feeling, crossed the gentleman's face, but this time he said nothing, only smiled faintly, a curious smile, as he passed up the steps. Dan walked on, richer with his one gleam of light than Dr. Williston with the full flood of glory he had darkened—lighter in his unenlightened but unquestioning faith than Dr. Williston in all his learned unbelief.

"Little ragamuffin! How like the heir to a kingdom he talked!" muttered the doctor, pausing a moment beside the flowers as he entered his house before he took up the morning paper that was waiting for him.

The child made his way back to Sime with his treasured bit of silver and what other things had been given him at the different places, and that ease-loving commander of the expedition took possession of the money at once, and emptying the con-

tents of the little bag into a larger one, accompanied Dan to the head of another street and set him to work again. He established his own headquarters, meanwhile, on the sunny side of an unoccupied building, where he would not be likely to attract much observation and could enjoy himself by doing nothing.

It was a wearisome day to little Dan. Over and over again he told his simple story of where he lived, and who he was, and what he wanted, and answered the many questions that were put to him. He wandered on, sometimes kindly treated, sometimes rudely driven away; now running, frightened, from some dog that resented his approach to its master's premises, now hurrying his escape from some group of tormenting boys; then lingering in some comfortable kitchen to which he had been admitted, unwilling to go out from its hospitable warmth and the light of kindly faces to the street once more. The little feet, accustomed as they were to "tramping," grew tired, and the small hand, knocking at so many doors, weary. He was glad when the round was completed and Sime, late in the afternoon, announced his intention of starting homeward.

Sime divided the store they had gathered between

the two bags, taking care not to give his companion the smaller portion to carry, then swinging his own over his shoulder, turned slowly in the direction they had come. Out of the city, following the winding country road for a mile or two until they came to the old one that led through the wood, they went, Dan's worn feet lagging somewhat toward the last, and finding it difficult to keep up with even Sime's slow gait.

"We've got a good deal o' things," he said, at last, having been silently thinking over what they carried by way of estimating what reception they might expect at the hut.

"Yaas," answered Sime, slowly, and reaching under his ragged coat, he drew forth a live fowl that had been concealed there in some manner best known to himself.

It made its voice heard as soon as it emerged into the light. Dan's eyes opened a little wider as they surveyed it, but he made no inquiries as to where it came from. Such questions were not customary among them, and, moreover, in his case, would have met no satisfactory answer. Sime viewed it with a little chuckle, but volunteered no explanation of how or where it came into his possession.

Arriving at the hut, maum met them and caught the bags out of their hands without waiting for either words or ceremony. She emptied out their contents with a monosyllabic ejaculation that expressed something like satisfaction, however, as she saw how much there was, and Dan threw himself down in one corner with a little sigh of relief.

The supper that evening was made from a part of what they had collected—the largest and strongest of the party coming in for the largest portion and daintiest pieces—but our tired little wanderer was well content to take what he could get and creep away to the place that served as a bed, to rest and sleep once more. There were so many such days in his life, so few that were any better, that it was little wonder that he prized the few hours spent in the village with those who were kind to him there.



CHAPTER X.

IN the large, light kitchen of the Mead farmhouse Vernie sat, with sleeves looped up from her white arms, busying herself in seeding raisins, chopping mincemeat and pounding spices, which, passing from her hands into older and more experienced ones, were, by some unknown magic of compounding, made to emerge from the oven in the form of tempting pies and cakes. Mrs. Mead moved about through all the making and directing, cheerful, bright and motherly, while Tildy flew hither and thither in a desperate hurry, making any amount of rattling and clattering in her fruitless efforts to do two things at once.

“Oh, I always like Thanksgiving and all the getting ready for it, it’s so nice!” said Vernie, in the full delight of her helping and watching.

“Well, I don’t know,” responded Tildy, rather doubtfully. “Thanksgivin’ is good enough in its way—I’ve got nothin’ agin’ it, as I know on—but

it does make a sight of stewin', cookin' and dishes to wash."

"But I think that's just the fun," persisted Vernie.

"That's 'cause you don't have it to do," answered Tildy.

The imputation of such an ignoble cause for her pleasure, together with the apparent slight put upon her assistance, rather discomfited the young lady for a moment, then she looked up, met her mother's eyes and smiled.

"Mother likes it too," she said.

The mother smiled an answer, with a tender, half-pitying thought, as she glanced at the bright young face, of how little while it would be before these eagerly-welcomed holidays would be no longer unmixed pleasure. Only a little while longer, and the girl would have entered upon her human birthright of a past and its memories, and there would begin the sad undertone that runs for evermore through all earthly music. Under the smiling welcome for those who came would linger the heart's longing for those it missed; among the real faces would flit shadowy, haunting ones, and the laughing, pleasant voices, however dear, ring strangely into the silence that should be filled by

other voices not less dear. But not yet—not now, when for her

“No dear face was farther than the door,
No loved one beyond call.”

So the mother only smiled, and kept her thought unspoken.

“You see,” said Tildy, meditatively, “this appointin’ a day to be thankful in is all well enough, but there’s such a sight of worry an’ fuss a gettin’ ready to be thankful, an’ such a bother of clearin’ up after you’re through with it, that I don’t know— Well, it’s a ’mazin’ good thing for poor folks, I’ll say that for it!” she added, abruptly, as her eyes fell upon two baskets nicely filled and standing upon the table. “There’s some folks will be glad there’s been so much cookin’ goin’ on.”

“You can count me as one of those same astonishing folks,” said Lewis, making his appearance at the door in time to catch the last words. “Mother, Jas and I are going to the dépôt to meet uncle and Kent, if they come on the afternoon train.”

Mr. Graham and Kent always spent Thanksgiving at the farmhouse, although the former

seldom visited there at any other time. It was not that he cared little for the place or its inmates—more, perhaps, because he cared so much. It was the old homestead of the Meads, and Robert Graham had first met his wife there. Thither he had been wont to return with her, in the glad years that her life made bright, to family reunion and festival, and there he had borne her, at last, to sleep with her kindred. Every nook of the old home was, for him, linked with memories of her—associations holding such sorrow in their depths of tenderness that he did not dare to turn away from his ordinary life to face them often.

Mr. and Mrs. Mead, knowing something of the wealth of love that had been lavished upon his wife, understood his feelings in part, and wondered less than the younger members of the family at his infrequent visits, and coming or staying he held always his own place—he was always *Brother Robert*. It told something for the truth and sterling worth of each that when the golden link that had bound them together dropped away from their lives, this friendship, unostentatious, but deep and earnest, unquestioning and unchanging, remained.

One sore bereavement he had known, but, aside

from that, everything that earth could bestow was Robert Graham's—wealth, intellect, position, reputation—yet Mrs. Mead's true, tender heart always thought of him with a kind of anxious pity. Year after year she looked into his eyes, hoping to find a new expression there—something that should tell her that Helen's faith was his, that at last he had seen the “stars shine through his cypress trees.” But it seemed long waiting, and this year was like the others.

“Do I look older, uglier, wickeder?—which is it, Hetty?” he asked, still holding her hand in a warm clasp, but laughing a little at her earnest glance.

“A little older, perhaps, not the other—not the last, I hope,” she answered, smiling. But under the smile a sadder voice repeated with a sigh, “Not yet,” and then faith, unwavering, took up its silent prayer again.

Open fires made every room in the old house bright, warm and cheerful, lighting up the walls, gleaming on the polished surface of the heavy, old-fashioned mahogany and bringing a glow to the faces in the old portraits—quaint old portraits that, despite stiff attitudes, odd dresses and all the wear and tear of time that had come to them and

their originals, still held a slight resemblance to some of the living faces below them. But inviting and bright as the rooms were, they could not long content the boys. What house was ever large enough long to contain the amount of restless life represented by three boys? They had been over it, from the cellar where the apples were stored to the attic where they hoarded their own peculiar treasures, and were out of doors before long. They explored the new granary, visited the stables, petted the horses and then wandered away through the dismantled orchard, and across the brown stubble-fields, to the lake side.

The water, bright and sparkling as it was in the summer-time, looked dull and cold under the gray November sky, and the distant shore showed through its veil of mist barren and dreary, while the moaning wind, sounding colder than it felt, swept down from the hillside. The dreary desolateness of the scene mirrored something of itself upon the spirits of those who gazed upon it, though but faintly. It could not bring to them the fast crowding memories that older hearts would have known—"O death in life, the days that are no more!"—nor interpret the wind's wailing into a cry of "gone, gone!" It only brought a vague

shadow, uncomprehended, thrown forward from the future, rather than backward from the past.

An old boat lay upturned on the pebbly beach, and they seated themselves upon it, silent at first, and when conversation began again, it dropped into a quieter, more thoughtful tone.

"How thick the mist is growing along the other shore!" said Jasper, after watching it for a few minutes. "It will hide it altogether soon, and leave us as if we were looking out on an ocean with no land in sight."

"I wish it were the ocean," said Lewis, quickly; "though," he added after a moment, "that wouldn't do me any good, either: I should want to be beyond it."

"And what would you do there?" Kent asked.

"Oh, I don't know—everything or anything. I just want to see the world. It isn't half living, shut up on this little farm, and I don't mean to stay here very much longer."

"Going to tie your bundle up in a pocket-handkerchief and sling it on a stick over your shoulder, like the enterprising boys we read about in the newspapers?" asked Kent.

"Or those fellows that slip out of chamber-windows at night and run away to sea? Well, I don't

know as I'd mind very much—there would be some fun and adventure about it; only," catching Jasper's glance, "I wouldn't treat father and mother after any such fashion. You needn't look at me so, Jas: I don't mean to do it; but if they were like some people I know of, I'd be off in a hurry;" and the boy's dark eyes flashed.

"One might think you wished they were, just to give you a chance, by the way you talk, Lew," answered his brother, a little indignantly.

"I didn't say so," said Lewis, picking up a stone and whirling it out into the water. He watched it as it went plashing down and the ever-widening circles that swept around the spot, then, after a moment, said more slowly: "It's such a quiet, dull way to live, this seeing always the same things, doing always the same old work, over and over again. If, as that lecturer that was here the other day was saying, every one's future lies before him like a block of marble for him to shape, I'd like to cut something new out of mine, I'm sure."

"Every one must build, one way or another," said Kent, his thoughts going back to one of Aunt Gray's twilight talks.

"Well, what are you building?" asked Lewis, suddenly.

The question was unexpected, and Kent paused a moment to consider.

“Not much of anything by myself, I believe,” he said, “only trying to help along a little in what others are doing—filling up the chinks.”

“A bucket of mortar would do that,” said Lewis, laughing, but a little contemptuously.

Kent smiled, his own frank, sunny smile.

“Well, I’ll be a bucket of mortar, then. What is the difference, so long as the building goes up?”

“It would make some difference to me,” Lewis answered. “No; this sort of life is all good and nice and honorable enough for those that like it—I don’t say it isn’t—but it don’t suit me. I want more excitement, adventure and change, to get out into the world and take my chance for going up or down. If I had plenty of money, wouldn’t I travel, though! I’m not so very fond of learning from books—it takes Jas to do that—but I like to see things and find out for myself what they’re like.”

“So he is going to take the reality and leave you the books, Jasper,” said his cousin.

“All right—if I can only get enough of them,” Jasper replied; “I’d rather go to college than over the ocean, a great deal, and I shouldn’t wonder

if my chances were rather better for it than Lew's are to do the other."

"I don't know about that," said Lewis, resolutely. "If I don't like farming, why, I'm not fit for a farmer. Father will say so himself when he finds I am not content to stay here. Just wait a little while and you will see;" and he sprang from his seat and sent another stone whirling out over the water.

He was older than Kent by nearly a year, a little taller and considerable heavier. He was not so handsome, perhaps, but still there was a certain boyish grace about his strong, healthful form, as he stood there, so full of restless life and energy. His face, brown as a nut from sun and wind, and his brown eyes, with an impatient light in them just now, spoke him what he was—impulsive, fiery and not easily controlled, yet warm-hearted and generous too.

His brother was like and yet singularly unlike him. There was the same cast of features, but in some way softer and gentler; the same broad brow, but paler and more thoughtful; the same dark eyes, but with a steadier, more dreamy light in them. He was younger, smaller, more slender. Strangers often remarked that they bore a strong resemblance

to each other, while intimate friends could scarcely see any.

There was a moment's silence, broken only by the sound of the stones striking the water, for Lewis sent one after another in rapid succession, until the bosom of the lake seemed quivering and heaving with something like the restless, bounding life of his own. Then he turned, and said a little hesitatingly, as if not quite able to express his thought in words, and feeling something of boyish dread, besides, that it might sound fanciful or sentimental, or something of that sort which a boy so despises :

"I don't know why it is, but some way it seems as if this kind of a day always stirs up all the *restless* there is in me. The wind goes rushing along as if it were some great army sweeping out into the world to do all sorts of mighty things, and I want to be out in it, to go—to do—well, I don't know what, only it makes me uneasy, and I feel as though I couldn't keep still. I know it's all nonsense, but— There it comes now ! just hear it !" pausing as the wind swept down from the hill-side and rushed by them with its strange, weird, solemn sound.

"Yes ; isn't it grand ? and it's awful too !" an-

swered Jasper, dreamily. "But it doesn't so much make me feel like doing as it makes it seem that there isn't hardly anything worth doing—things that I care about usually, I mean. They all look so little and empty and not worth much, as if such a wind would sweep them all away, and was hurrying the world and everybody in it on to the end. I can't tell exactly what I mean; only some way it makes me think of that dirge in some of the old Readers:

'But a day is coming fast,
Earth, thy mightiest and thy last;
It will come in fear and wonder,
Heralded by trump and thunder.'

"Isn't it strange," said Kent, "how the same things will make different persons think of such different things? I remember Aunt Gray's once saying that every storm that came and every wind that blew seemed to her to be saying, 'For Christ's sake, for Christ's sake,' and every blessing that came to the world was because he had loved it and died for it. But then," added Kent, thoughtfully, "it always seemed to me as if she herself were just living for his sake."

"If I felt like that," said Jasper, slowly, gazing out over the water, "I don't think anything would

ever sound mournful or dreary to me—at least, I shouldn't ever be afraid of *anything*. Don't you wish—”

“Jas,” interrupted Lewis, turning suddenly toward him with a quickness in his tone that did not seem quite natural, “you are getting hoarse. If your cough is worse to-night, mother will blame us both for not using better sense than to sit out here in the cold, and give you such a dose of herb tea, as won't be good to take, besides. Come, Kent, let us go back.”

Mr. Graham, sitting by a window, saw them as they came toward the house.

“Those young gentlemen that you were wondering about are coming now, Hetty, safe and sound. How Lewis and Jasper have grown! Kent has been doing the same, I suppose, but I notice the change more in them, not having seen them for a year. What do you suppose we shall make of those boys?” he said, laughing.

“I hope God will make good, true, noble men of them all,” answered Mrs. Mead, earnestly, from the depths of her mother's heart.

“Yes. It will not take many years now to make them men of some sort. By the way,” turning toward his brother-in-law, “you were

speaking of my keeping the mill running this winter: that was Kent's doing. There is no profit in keeping it going just now, except what little there may be in keeping the workmen together, but Kent had become so interested in some of them that he could not bear to think of their being all turned out of employment. He insisted upon looking at the matter from their point of view, and was so eloquent and disconsolate that he had his own way, as he generally does—rather too often, perhaps. I don't regret it in this case, however, though I can't say much for the economy of the arrangement."

"I don't know about that, Robert; I'm not so sure about that," answered the farmer, slowly shaking his head. "When hard times oblige us to economize, it is a great deal better to begin with our own pudding than with somebody's else bread and butter."

"Economy, like charity, should begin at home, you think?" and Mr. Graham smiled pleasantly and inquiringly on his brother-in-law. "That would certainly make this an easier world for many people to live in."

The boys came in, and Jasper stood beside his mother's chair for a moment, his hand resting upon

it. She looked up at him with something of reproof in her glance :

“ You ought not to have been out so long this cold day with that cough of yours, Jasper ; not even a tippet about your neck, either ; it was very thoughtless ! ”

“ Oh, I didn’t need it any ; I wasn’t cold, and I did tie my handkerchief about my throat coming home,” he answered, unfastening the article and slipping it carelessly into his pocket. Suddenly he started and pulled it hastily out again : “ Oh, I forgot ! Really, it is too bad, mother, but I never once thought of it ! ”

“ Thought of what ? ” she asked.

“ I’ll show you in a minute—a letter for you. Here it is,” dropping it into her lap. “ I got it out of the office when Lew and I were going to the dépôt, and seeing uncle and Kent made me forget all about it until I just now felt it in my pocket. It is odd that I didn’t remember it, because I was wondering a little where it came from ; it was a queer post-mark, and I didn’t know the writing.”

“ I don’t know it either,” said Mrs. Mead, scanning the envelope somewhat curiously, and then breaking it open. Her glance wandered over the page for a moment, sought the signature ; then,

with a look of pleasure and surprise, she turned to her husband :

“It is from Cousin Herbert, Nathan—Herbert Austin.”

“Herbert Austin! Well, it is not wonderful that you did not recognize the writing. Why, it is nine or ten years since we have heard from him. You never knew him, I think, Robert?—a cousin of Mrs. Mead’s, who used to be with us quite often sixteen or seventeen years ago. He has been a great rover since then, and it has been a long time that we have not even heard from him. The last we knew, he had gone to the Sandwich Islands with his wife and child.”

“And he is there still,” said Mrs. Mead, “but his daughter is here—in the State, I mean. He has sent her to a school at Hudson, and wishes that any of us going to the city should call and see her, and also that we will allow her to make her home with us during her vacations. He writes that he is sorry that she could not have come to us first, but he was unable to leave home himself, and so placed Lucy in charge of a friend who could accompany her no farther than to the school in Hudson.”

“Wants you to call and see her when you go to

the city? Why, you don't go there oftener than once in two or three years!" commented Jasper.

His father laughed.

"He has forgotten that farmers do not very often travel even fifty miles from home. However, we must try to do it before long, for the sake of making the young lady's acquaintance, so that it may not be quite like coming among strangers when she comes to us for the holidays."

"At Christmas? Do you think she will be here then, mother?" exclaimed Vernie, in a tone that expressed something of pleasure, and yet a little of dismay also.

"I hope so, if they have a vacation then, as almost every school does. I am sure she will be heartily welcome, will she not, Vernie?"

"Yes—oh yes! I think it will be nice to have her here; only—well—she is a little older than I am, isn't she? and I was just thinking that if she should know so much, and be so *very* lady-like—" Vernie hesitated.

"And what then?" asked Mr. Graham, passing his arm around her. "I do not know what advantages this young lady may have had, Vernie, but I think your mother's daughter ought to be a lady in the highest, truest sense of the word."

Vernie's eyes sparkled, and she glanced over to where her mother was sitting. "She is splendid, isn't she?" she said, in a burst of loving enthusiasm.

"I think she is," answered Mr. Graham, laughing a little to see the soft flush rise to the mother's still smooth cheek.

"But then," pursued Vernie, after a moment's pause, "I am not as nice nor half as good as my mother is. I don't believe Lucy Austin is either, but then she may know a great deal more than I do, and be— Well, I hardly know what; only she has always lived in a city, I suppose."

"If you think city life such an advantage, why don't you try to improve by paying us a visit occasionally?" asked her uncle, pushing the shining curls back from her face. "We should be very glad to have you come and brighten up the old house a little, wouldn't we, Kent?"

"Indeed we would," answered Kent, eagerly. He felt it sometimes, the want in his beautiful home, where no mother's face ever looked from the window or smiled at the table, where no sister's light step ever sounded, and wondered if Lewis and Jasper really knew how rich they were.

"I hope Lucy will know a good deal, for my

part," said Lewis, meditatively, "and be a real nice, sensible girl that can tell us all about the people and how they live at the Sandwich Islands. There are any amount of things I'd like to ask her about. Heigho! I wish I could go and see for myself!"

His father only smiled, but the mother's eyes turned toward her boy anxiously; they followed him often with that glance, yet smiled whenever he turned to meet them. O loving, watchful mother-eyes, what tireless guardianship they keep the wide world over!



CHAPTER XI.

IT was a stormy day, with a cloudy sky bending over the earth and shutting out the sun, a cold wind rattling the leafless branches of the trees and snow falling in fitful showers—a dreary day as seen from the windows of warm, bright rooms, but drearier far at the little hut in the woods. It was dark and gloomy within, except as the fire lighted it, for the pieces of old quilts and blankets that had been hung over the window openings to keep out the cold excluded the light also. Even then the place was not comfortably warm, for the wind found ingress through various cracks and crevices, and occasionally swept down the not very skillfully constructed chimney, and whirled the smoke in such stifling volumes out into the room that the inmates were forced to open the door to let it escape, however the cold might rush in.

Adding fresh fuel to the fire, stirring it into a fiercer blaze and crouching and shivering around

it in various attitudes were those who called the miserable place home. The old woman, silent and insensible-seeming as ever to all about her, occupied her accustomed seat in her accustomed position, bent nearly double, her elbows resting upon her knees, her chin supported by her hands. Sime had ensconced himself on the old tub, as near as possible to the fire, and having secured the warmest position the place afforded, seemed determined not to be moved from it. He was apparently well satisfied to have nothing to do but watch the dancing, flashing blaze. Moll sat near him with the lazy willow weaving that seemed almost a part of her, her lean brown fingers moving so slowly that they scarcely seemed working at all. Bill was stretched upon the rags and straw, somewhat stupid and not a little cross from the liquor he had been drinking. He had been lying about for three or four days, scarcely showing himself outside the hut, and nearly all that time a quarrel had been raging between him and maum. Dan, from his obscure corner, watching them both with his great black eyes, could not quite understand what it was about. It was something that Bill had been engaged in on his last trip—had done or neglected to do—that might bring him into trouble, and made him think

it not safe to go out, he fancied, but he was too wise to ask any questions. Whatever it was, maum kept alluding to it either angrily or tauntingly, and Bill would answer sometimes fiercely and sometimes sulkily, while the child, fearing them both, kept as much as possible out of the reach of either of them.

Bill seemed to be sleeping heavily the greater part of this day, rousing up occasionally, however, to mutter out something about the fire or grumble his dissatisfaction when the door was opened, and ordering Dan out two or three times to gather up and bring in more fuel. It was growing late in the afternoon when maum announced that some one must go out and try to sell Moll's one completed basket and beg some cold pieces.

"Hain't got nothin' t'eat much," she said, composedly. "Go, an' somebody'll give ye somethin', Sime."

"I ain't a goin' to—Dan must," responded Sime, indolently.

"No," answered Dan, disconsolately, shrinking farther back into his corner.

"Yaas, ye be goin' arter cold pieces—quick!" said Sime.

"It's too cold," urged Dan, piteously, with a

glance half appealing, half apprehensive, toward maum. But she appeared wholly uninterested in the conversation, satisfied to let Sime arrange the matter as pleased him.

“If ye don’t start, I’ll wake Bill,” said Sime again, making a motion in the direction of the sleeper. Dan started up in terror lest the threat should be carried out, and Sime settled himself again with a little chuckle of satisfaction.

The child lifted a corner of the tattered quilt from one of the windows and looked out. It was so cold and stormy that he drew back, shivering, to the fire again, and lingered there even after maum had provided bag and basket, making his arrangements so very slowly that Sime repeated his threat, and thus obliged him to start.

It seemed a long, long distance that day that lay between him and the village. The snow was lying thick and white on the path, and found its way readily to his feet through their miserable covering. The storm had increased within the last hour, and the flakes were falling thick and fast, while the driving wind hurled it into his face and eyes in a blinding shower. He turned, sometimes, and walked with his back toward it, for a few moments, to recover his breath, but that was making

slow progress, and he found himself wandering from the path, first on one side, and then on the other. Indeed, it was not quite easy to keep it, walk which way he would, for it was but a narrow one and covered with snow, while the now dismantled trees and broken bushes left almost equal openings on all sides. Still, he knew the direction in which the village lay, and pressed forward, striving to encourage himself with thoughts of the cheerful warmth that would meet him at Mrs. Gray's or in old Hannah's comfortable kitchen at Mr. Crail's. He wrapped the bag maum had given him about his shoulders, and finally slipped the willow basket over his head, tipping it a little so that he could see where he was going. It was a slight shield from the cutting wind, but was constantly sliding down over his face, and afforded no warmth to his aching ears. He tried to warm them by holding his hands over them, but the poor little fingers were soon almost freezing in their turn when withdrawn from the pockets where they had sought shelter. Then he ran as fast as his stiffening, aching feet would carry him, until, fairly out of breath, he was obliged to stop and lean against a tree to rest.

Tears started to his eyes, forced out by keen pain. He had walked a long distance from the

hut—or it seemed so in that storm—but even if he had not, he dared not go back; they would only drive him out again, he knew. So, after a moment or two, he started on once more. Pictures of the bright, cozy room he had so often seen rose before him as visions of water, cool streams and clear fountains come to the thirsty traveler in the desert. He saw old Hannah's brightly-scoured tins hanging in shining rows on the wall; heard the fire roaring and crackling in the great black stove, and even the purring of the gray cat stretched comfortably beside it. Then he fancied he could see the pretty carpet at Mrs. Gray's, the soft hearth-rug before the open fire and the plants in the deep window-seat.

He emerged from the woods into the open country road after a time, walking more and more slowly. His first intense suffering from the cold had passed away, and he only felt tired—so tired. If he could only lie down on that soft hearth-rug of Mrs. Gray's!

“She'll lemme lay down there an' sleep, mebbey—ain't wantin' nothin' to eat, like I did,” he murmured faintly, and sat down to think about it.

Some dim thought of his errand came to him again, and maum's anger if he lingered, and he



Little Dan in the Snow Storm.

rose and staggered on a little farther. But the terrible weariness soon conquered, and he sank down once more and, after a moment, lay back on the snow and closed his eyes, while the white flakes fell thick and fast, but very softly, over him. Poor little Dan! never before, lying down to sleep, had he known such gentle covering.

That same afternoon Miss Crail sat in her little parlor alone, save as Hannah passed in and out for question or consultation. It was a pretty, tasteful room, with its cozy lounges and easy-chairs, its pictures and books, vases and brackets. The little slender woman, occupying a low chair in the glow of the firelight, was in perfect keeping with her surroundings. She was not beautiful, not even pretty, but there was a certain delicate grace about her, manifest in her figure, movement, dress, twined in the braids of her soft brown hair, lurking in the simple white lace at her throat, and touching even her slender slippered foot, that marked her, beyond all possibility of mistaking, a lady. Time and sorrow and thought had chiseled that quiet, earnest face of hers, but they had done it exquisitely, bringing out its sweetness, peace and purity in clearly-cut lines.

She laid aside her work at last, in smiling com-

pliance with Hannah's oft repeated advice: "Better not try doin' dem button-holes dis dark arternoon, Miss Marfa, 'deed ye hadn't; dey's too tryin' to de eyes." Then she had taken up a book, but dropped it in her lap presently, because it was growing dark so fast, and sat gazing into the glowing coals with thoughtful eyes, while the shadows deepened without.

"'Pears like it's gwine to be a drefful stormy night," said Hannah, bringing in fresh fuel. "Folks wid good houses 'doughter be t'ankful, dey had! 'Spect I'd better make some warm muffins for tea, so's to hab somfin' hot an' cheery like. Sha'n't I shet dem shutters now, Miss Marfa?"

Miss Crail walked to the windows, and pressing her face against the glass, looked out into the dusky twilight. Only gloom and storm and cold! One could scarcely gaze out into such a night and not grow sad. She turned away in a moment.

"Yes, Hannah, you may close them."

But before she could obey a sled drove up, and a man's voice was heard calling to his horses; then came a loud knock at the door, and Hannah hastened to answer it.

"Is Mr. Crail at home?"

"Not jes yet; be in d'rec'ly, I 'spect," she an-

swered, shading her eyes with her hand and peering out into the gathering darkness to discover who spoke to her. "Better come in an' wait, hadn't ye?"

"Yes; I want to see him, and there's a bundle out there on my sled that I must bring in. You keep the door open a minute and hold that light so I can see;" and he sprang off the step and down the walk again.

"Not berry polite wid' his bundle," commented Hannah, in a low tone. She complied with his directions, nevertheless, and in a moment the man reappeared bearing something in his arms, and brushing past her, walked straight into the brightly-lighted parlor and deposited his burden upon the floor.

"It's some youngster I found by the roadside half buried up in the snow, and whether he is living or dead I can't say," he said, noticing Miss Crail's startled glance. "I don't know who he is or where he's from, and I'm afraid he'll never be able to tell, but we must try and see if there is any life in him."

"Dat's yer bundle, is it? Well, dar, now!" said Hannah, in amazement. "No wonder ye was in such a drefful hurry gettin' him in, poor chile!" and she was on her knees beside him in a moment.

“Queer rig he is in—a basket hitched over his head,” said the man. “There! now it’s off!”

“Oh, it is little Dan!” exclaimed Miss Crail, in a tone of horror and pity, as the light fell full on the still, cold face.

“Oh, dat poor little lamb! so ’tis, sure!” echoed Hannah, her hands for an instant dropping helplessly.

“You know him, then?” the stranger questioned. “I found him by the road not far from the old wood. If it had been a little later, I should not have seen him at all; as it was, I just caught sight of something dark sticking out of the snow. I thought it looked a little queer, so I jumped off the sled and went to it, and found this little fellow. I was coming to see Mr. Crail, anyway, and so I thought the best thing I could do was to bring him right here as fast as I could. I’m glad you know who he is.”

“’Deed we does. Mos’ ebberybody round Clannyford knows little Dan. Poor chile! out in such a storm as dis yere!” answered Hannah, going busily to work to remove the worn shoes and loosen his scant clothing.

Miss Crail brought warm blankets, and they bathed and rubbed the cold form, chafed the stiff-

ened fingers, and applied every restorative within their power. The stranger looked on anxiously.

"If he has any folks anywhere around here that ought to be told, why, I'm willing to go and let them know. My team is at the door yet, if you think I had best go for any one," he said.

Miss Crail hesitated for a moment.

"I think not," she answered, slowly. "No; there is no one that will be troubled about him."

"I jes' wish Mrs. Gray was here," said Hannah, uneasily, a little later. "'Pears like she knows so much 'bout sick folks."

"It is such a stormy night that I scarcely know how she could get here," Miss Crail replied, yet with a tone in her voice that echoed the old colored woman's wish.

Hannah caught it, and pressed her suggestion eagerly.

"'Tain't so berry fur neither, if dis gemman would jes' go fur her wid his sleigh. Ye'd feel a sight better to hab her here, Miss Marfa, honey, I knows ye would."

"If there's any one round here that you'd like, ma'am, or think could do the boy any good, I'm willing to go for them," interposed the stranger, in his brusque but kindly way. "Just say the word."

And longing for Mrs. Gray's advice and assistance, though not without misgivings at calling her out in such a storm, Miss Crail accepted his proposition and directed him where to go.

"Tell her it is little Dan, and she will understand," she said as he drove away.

It was but a very few moments before he returned, his mission successfully accomplished, and Mrs. Gray, gentle, tender and motherly, was ready to go quietly and understandingly to work.

Soon Mr. Crail came in, and paused at the door in astonishment at the scene that met him in his usually quiet home. His sister came to him with a few words of explanation.

"Ah, that little odd mite of humanity, is it? Shameful to have sent him out such a day as this! It is about all that could be expected, however, and I don't know but it is just as well if it does finish him. He is living, though," he added, glancing at the child more closely.

"Yes," Miss Crail answered, in a lower tone, for the boy began to revive and show signs of returning consciousness.

Busily they worked over him that evening—the poor little waif whose whole life before had never known so much of care or attention—until the

chilled blood was coursing naturally through his veins again. Then Hannah bore him to a comfortable bed, and covered him with soft, warm blankets, in the cozy little room that she had made cheerful with a bright fire.

Outside, though the snow had nearly ceased falling, the wind still blew fiercely, driving it into great white drifts. The farmer, who had come to see Mr. Crail on business, was fairly storm-bound and obliged to remain over-night.

"I'm afraid my folks'll be a little uneasy about me," he said, yielding to the necessity. "I hadn't any idea the storm was going to turn into such a regular blow; still, I can't wish I had stayed at home, so long as my coming was the means of saving that poor little fellow's life. I hope it will clear up by to-morrow," he added, going to the door and glancing up at the cloudy sky.

His wish was granted. The morning dawned clear and sunny, lighting up the snow as with millions of tiny lamps, and he was able to take his departure. He went first, however, to Dan's room for a farewell glance at the little sleeper whom he had rescued from a colder slumber. A smile came to his rough face.

"Sleeping comfortable as a kitten, ain't he?"

He'll be all right in a day or two. Such youngsters get over anything easy, and he's fallen into good hands, that's very sure, ma'am. Nobody could be kinder than you have been."

It was late in the day when the black eyes opened, and there was a bewildered, troubled look in them as they glanced around the room and rested at last on Miss Crail, who sat there. She fancied that he did not know where he was, or was trying to comprehend how he came there, and she went to the bedside :

"You know me, Dan?"

"Yes," scanning her face with the same serious, earnest gaze.

"And you are at my house. You were coming to the village yesterday, and got tired and lay down in the snow, didn't you?" half questioningly.

"A gentleman brought you here."

He seemed to recollect then something of what had happened.

"I must go; maum'll be mad; she wants the cold pieces," he said, raising his head a little from its pillow. But in a moment it fell wearily back again.

"Oh no; lie still," Miss Crail answered, soothingly. "It stormed so that she would know you

could not go back. Do not worry yourself; no one will be angry."

He closed his eyes with a faint sigh, whether of weariness or relief she could not tell, but presently opened them again, and stretching out his little brown hand, patted the soft white pillow.

"It's nice," he said.

"Yes; you shall stay here until you are well. But you have not had any breakfast yet. Hannah will bring you some."

He ate very little, however, when it was prepared, nor did he seem to wish for anything all day, except to lie quiet and still.

"He may not be well enough to be out again for a day or two yet, and I suppose we ought to let those people in the hut know where he is," said Miss Crail to Mrs. Gray, when the latter ran in, just at evening, to inquire once more after the little patient.

"They are so used to looking out each one for himself and taking no care of others that I do not imagine they will feel much troubled about him. Still, we cannot tell exactly, and it is only right they should know," Mrs. Gray answered.

"And I think Dan himself would feel more content and free from all dread of maum's anger

if he knew that she understood where he was and why he was staying," Miss Crail rejoined. "If I only knew how to send them word—"

"Could not Teddy Cresly go?" suggested her friend. "He knows the place, and could easily explain all that it would be necessary to have them know. I think he would rather like the errand," smiling, "and if you wish, I will see him to-morrow."

This arrangement was decided upon, and the next day, Teddy, after receiving Mrs. Gray's instructions, started upon his walk very readily, elated by the brightness of the day and the importance of being a messenger, besides being pleased to gratify his curiosity by another view of the interior of the hut, since he had the lawful excuse of an errand for doing so. There was something comical in the air of boldness and importance with which he marched up to the rude door and knocked.

Sime answered his summons, and discovering who the intruder was, stood gazing at him with as much indignation as his habitual indolence would permit. Teddy, however, bestowed very little attention upon him, but seeing maum by the fire, pushed his way in and addressed her.

"See here, missus," he called, by way of attract-

ing her notice, "that boy o' yours—Dan—he's sick at Mr. Crail's."

"Hey?" said maum, not seeming to comprehend.

"Yes, he is. He was 'most froze day before yesterday. He got tired and laid down in the snow to sleep, I s'pose, and you wouldn't have got no more cold pieces out of him if nobody hadn't found him," said Teddy, earnestly. "He was part covered up, and a man come along and found him, and carried him in his sleigh to Mr. Crail's. He was all white and didn't know nothin', but they rubbed him and give him things to take, and he's better now. He's in bed, though, and can't come back yet, so they sent me to tell you."

"Sick, Dan is?" repeated maum, questioningly.

"Yes'm. They're goin' to keep him till he gets well; they s'posed you was willin'."

"Yaas," she answered, slowly. If they had felt any anxiety concerning Dan, they manifested none then, and no one asked any further questions, so Teddy, having improved the opportunity to take a good survey of the place while he was talking, took his leave.

It is probable that maum felt some measure of relief in learning that the boy was safe, and it might have been partly curiosity concerning him

that led her to the village with a few baskets two or three days later. She stopped at Mr. Crail's, and without waiting to have her ask for him, Miss Crail explained how the child was brought to them, and asked if she would like to see him. She made no reply, but as the lady at once arose to lead the way, she followed her.

Dan was lying very still, though with his eyes open, gazing out of the window, as he seemed content to do for hours at a time, but he started as he saw maum enter, and a shadow passed over his face—an expression of mingled sorrow and fear, with something of entreaty in it too. But maum only gazed at him for a moment or two, then turned and walked out of the room without a word.

“Maum ain't goin' to take me away?” asked Dan after she had gone and Miss Crail came back to the room.

“Oh no; you are to stay here until you are quite well,” she answered.

After that he was satisfied, and the fear of maum's displeasure that had seemed to haunt him passed away. She knew where he was, had seen him and left him there, and he was content. But he did not recover rapidly, as they had expected

and hoped, and indeed scarcely seemed to gain strength at all. He evinced no restlessness, no inclination to move about. They changed his position occasionally to a sofa or easy-chair, but he liked best to lie still in the place where he had awakened that first morning. He suffered no pain. "Jest tired—it's nice here," he said, in answer to all inquiries. But the "tired" lasted so long that Miss Crail grew uneasy.

"I should like to have a physician see him," she said one day.

"Why don't you send for one, then?" her brother asked; "though really, I do not see anything remarkable in that poor toad's feeling inclined to stick to a comfortable bed now that he is enjoying one for the first time in his life."

She smiled, but she despatched a messenger to the city that very day, and toward evening Dr. Williston came. Miss Crail's acquaintance with him was but slight. One who had been their family physician for years had removed to another place, and Dr. Williston had lately been engaged in his stead. She had great confidence in his opinion, however, and briefly explaining how the invalid came in her charge, she led him at once to the room.

The child was sleeping, and as the doctor looked at him his first expression of mere professional interest changed to a curiously perplexed, puzzled look; then a flash of recognition came, and he smiled.

“Ah, my little prince of beggars, it is you!”

He placed his fingers gently on the small brown wrist, but light as the touch was it awoke the sleeper, and the large eyes were wide open in an instant, scanning the doctor's face with serious, steady gaze.

“And so you are sick, my little man?” said the doctor, cheerily. “What is the matter?”

“No—ain't sick; I'm tired,” Dan replied.

“Well, what makes you tired?”

“Trampin', guess,” was the answer, given slowly, and as if he felt very little interest in either the effect or its cause.

“Oh, that is it? Well, we must try and get you rested then, so that you can get up and walk about again.”

A faint shadow passed over the childish face, and the little brown hand patted the soft pillow affectionately.

“It's good here; I like it,” he said.

The doctor lingered for some time, examining

and questioning closely and carefully; then passing out, he paused for a moment in the hall below to speak with Miss Crail.

"I think we shall have him about again after a while," he said. "It will take time, however—not so much because of any settled organic disease as from an utter want of vitality. Hardship, exposure and cold have all been doing their work, and their effect cannot be counteracted at once. Probably you will do him far more good than I shall," smiling; "still, I will look after him again in a day or two, and see what my prescription has accomplished."

The winter days slipped by one by one, and Miss Crail grew more and more attached to her little charge. Mrs. Gray ran in to see him almost daily, and old Hannah could not do enough for him. He enjoyed all the petting, though with a kind of quiet wonder, and seemed to be perfectly happy and satisfied.

"I do not think I could ever consent to his going back to those people again," Miss Crail remarked one day.

"No," Mrs. Gray answered; "we must try and make some different arrangement for him when he gets better."

But gradually the expression "when he gets better" changed to "if he gets better," and after a time even that was dropped. The doctor came not infrequently, but he no longer spoke so hopefully as he had done at first. Yet he had "a fancy for the queer little waif," he said, "and liked to see him now and then." Once he brought him a few flowers—some white and scarlet geraniums, such as had so delighted him at the window, and a beautiful rose. The child's eyes glowed like stars as he saw them; he took them eagerly, and held them close to his face.

"You haven't got your garden yet," said the doctor, laughing at his earnestness.

"No; it's up yonder," he answered, quietly.

"The inheritance of the saints in light" was very real and tangible to him. His home, his flowers, all his treasures, were there, and he entertained no doubt of his possessions. From the few Sabbath-school lessons that his darkened life had known, that one thing he seemed to understand, remember and cling to. He liked to be told about it again and again, lying still and listening intently, though but seldom asking any questions. Once when he had spoken of something that he should have there in that simple, assured way, as another

child would speak of things he had at home, Mrs. Gray asked :

“How do you know that you will have all these things, Dan? You could not buy them or earn them ; who will give them to you ?”

“The Lord Jesus Christ,” he answered, unhesitatingly ; then, with a troubled, questioning look stealing into his eyes, “You told me so !”

Surely it was enough.

“Yes ; you are right,” Mrs. Gray said, her eyes moistening as she bent to kiss his forehead.

Days grew into weeks, the weeks flitted by, and it became very evident that his strength was slowly, surely failing—that new life and vigor would only come to him “up yonder.”

After maum’s one visit she never came again, and with the exception of Moll, who stopped at the door one day to offer her willow-ware, none of the inmates of the hut came to the house. Dan scarcely spoke of them ; he seemed to be almost forgetting the old life in those days of comfort and peace. They were pleasant days to him, every one, even to the last.

That day he had been lying for hours as if in quiet sleep. Miss Crail was sitting beside him, and Mrs. Gray had come in. Suddenly the dark

eyes unclosed for an instant, clear and bright, and the childish face said, faintly,

“Want to buy—any—willer baskets?”

Ah, no! not at the portals where he was standing! Yet he need not turn away to wander in the cold and gloom, for the door is thrown wide open, and he passes in to the light and love of heaven.

Miss Crail laid softly down the little hand she had held.

“He knows what Father and home are now,” she said.

The next day a messenger was despatched to the hut, but he found neither it nor its inmates; the place was deserted. The building itself had been torn down, and most of the boards that composed it carried away. A heap of ashes remained on the spot where the rude fireplace had been, and some straw, bits of rag and pieces of wood were scattered about. Nothing else was left to tell that it had been a human habitation—no living creature was in sight.

Whether something had occurred that made them think it not safe to remain any longer in that part of the country, whether they had concluded that Dan would not recover, and that without him begging would be less successful about Clannyford,

or whether they had simply remained as long as, in their vagabond, wandering life, it suited them to stay in one place, and so had moved on, no one could tell, nor whither they had gone. They had dropped out of Clannyford life and knowledge as suddenly as they had come into it, and they were seen there no more.



CHAPTER XII.

IN her "bit of a kitchen," clean as incessant scrubbing could make it, Maggie Nolan had seated herself with her sewing. Her plump red hands were working slowly and not very skillfully—they were more at home with a scouring brush than with a needle—trying to fashion a little dress. Less skillful than usual, even, they were to-day, for her thoughts kept wandering, and then her fingers blundered. She glanced uneasily at the clock now and then, and the children's questions received no answer but, "Ah, be quiet, thin, Kitty darlint," and, "Now, Mitty, don't be botherin'." Over the rosy face, always so ready to reflect any sunshine that fell upon it, a shadow was creeping and darkening.

By and by she dropped her work, and throwing her check apron over her head, she ran out to the gate to look up the road. Twice before, within the last hour, she had done the same thing, and not one of the neighbors on that quiet village street but could guess the cause.

“Looking for Tim; he is staying too long up at Favisham’s, likely,” one said to another. “Poor Maggie! she has a time of it trying to keep him straight!”

Poor Maggie! yet she stood her ground bravely in battling against this enemy that was trying to take her husband from her, from his children, himself and all usefulness. Successful or unsuccessful, she would not, dared not, give up the struggle. Victorious, hopeful, though she might be, she was never off guard, and defeated, however discouraged, she never surrendered. So now, when she saw him coming very unsteadily down the street, she waited to meet him and help him into the house. He had been so long in coming that she had felt almost sure how he would come at last, and the “Oh, Tim!” uttered so sadly, was her only word of reproach.

Kent Graham, passing up the street on the opposite side, had watched Tim as he drew near his home with unsteady tread with a strange blending of disappointment, indignation and pity. As he walked on he saw Sam standing in the door of the Cresly cottage, and stopped for a word or two with him; he wanted somebody’s sympathy on the subject.

“Did you see Tim Nolan just now? Isn’t it too bad?”

“Yes,” said Sam, answering both questions at once. “I s’pose, though, there ain’t anybody knows how hard it is to stop, after getting to like the stuff, only them that’s tried it. I read somewhere, the other day, about a doctor that had started a hospital for that kind of folks—said it was a sort of craziness, anyhow.”

“That’s a sensible idea! I think they must be insane,” said Kent, a little vexation still mingling with his disappointment. After a moment he added somewhat anxiously: “I am afraid Tim will lose his place in the mill again.”

“He ain’t likely to do that just now, anyhow. It’s Saturday evening, you see, and he’ll be all straight and fit to work by Monday,” Sam answered. “Factory stopped earlier to-day ’count of something Mr. Crail wanted fixed, so Tim’s been up to Favisham’s and met some of his chums there and got drunk.”

“Does he drink very often, do you think?” Kent asked.

“Well, no, not very—not reg’lar—only once in a while, and then it’s mostly on Saturdays when he has gone up to the store to buy groceries or some-

thing. That's the way with a good many of 'em round here."

"It's miserable, but I don't see that it can be helped," said Kent, despondingly.

"If I had money enough I'd find a way pretty quick—a way that would help some of it, anyhow," answered Sam, slowly. "It would be handy in a good many ways, and pay too, I guess."

"How?"

"Why, I'd start another store down here at Clannyford. I'd keep everything else as good or better than they do up at Favisham's, but I wouldn't keep whisky."

"I never thought of such a thing as that," said Kent, after considering the subject for a moment or two in silence. "But I don't know whether it would do much good. They are all so used to going to Favisham's that they would go there, anyway, wouldn't they? Do you suppose they would buy from the new store?"

"Course they would—'most all of 'em—if they could get things as cheap and as good. It would be handier, you see; they have to go nearly a mile for everything now. Besides, if I ain't mistaken, they'd soon find they could save money by trading at the new store."

“Save money? In what way?”

“By getting things cheaper. I’ll tell you how it is, Kent,” said Sam, earnestly; “Favisham has had all the trade for so long that he thinks he can ask what he likes and nobody say a word. He makes more than fair profits on some things, you’d better believe! There’s molasses, sugar and coffee, now. You see when I was in town one day I just thought I’d ask round, so I found out what they asked by the hogshead and sack, and what the retail stores sold ’em out for. It wasn’t Favisham’s prices, nohow!”

“Why, you must have been thinking a good deal about it?” said Kent, a little curiously.

“Yes; a good many things come into my head that there ain’t any use in, for I can’t do anything about it.” Sam threw away the stick he had been whittling, and shut up his knife. “But I’m pretty sure that if somebody would start a store here he could sell a good many things enough cheaper than Favisham to make folks trade with him, and do well, too.”

Kent was watching his companion with something of admiration mingling in his interest. How he had changed and improved in the last year! The evenings of reading and study were speaking

for themselves in his earnest face and intelligent opinions, and a certain quiet self-respect was taking the place of the old half-sullen shyness. Kent did not stop to analyze the change, nor could he fully comprehend it or its cause; he only felt it. Almost unconsciously something of his thought found its way into words:

“You must have a better business head than I have, Sam; I don’t believe I should ever have thought of such a plan.”

Sam laughed—a little gratified, perhaps.

“There’s no great wonder about that. ’Tain’t likely you’d be thinking how to make money; you’ve never wanted for it, and I have: that’s the difference. I don’t call that a plan, though. It’s only—well, a notion. A plan is something you mean to carry out, I take it, and I can’t do that—not yet.”

There was a history in that slowly spoken “not yet” of how the old discouraged, bitter, hopeless feelings in regard to the future had been gradually passing away, and new hope, courage and energy springing up in their place. Two years before Sam Cresly would not have spoken those words, nor, indeed, have indulged in the thoughts that had called them forth.

His home was still improving, too, gradually, and mostly in little things, though they did not seem little in the aggregate. A few new articles had been added—a chair or two, some fresh curtains and a half dozen new plates, cups and saucers for the desolate-looking shelves of the old cupboard. The children kept up the respectable appearance to which they had brought the yard tolerably well. Susie had a real love for flowers, and the few she owned now were the first and only pets she had ever had, and she took good care of them. Teddy's ambition in regard to the place showed itself by fits and starts. He would work at it perseveringly for a while, and then, but for Susie's coaxing, would have let it alone just as perseveringly for a much longer time. Still, with his occasional moods of industry, Susie's work and persuasion and the interest Sam manifested in the matter, the place had never relapsed into anything like its former condition.

Inside the house better order reigned also. After some pieces of furniture had been rearranged by Mrs. Clark, and it had been admitted that the new way looked better, Mrs. Cresly kept them so, though she would probably never have thought to make the change herself. She had

fallen into a habit of more careful sweeping and dusting, too, and Susie, having discovered that Mrs. Clark always brightened her tins and washed her cupboards every Friday, insisted upon imitating the performance. She considered it "lots of fun," and though her "cleaning days" were not the most wisely arranged, effective or thorough that was possible, they were still much better than none. In fact, Susie's bump of order was large, and at the first opportunity began to develop itself. Already her little hands were trying to smooth out many roughnesses, and in various matters noticeable to her childish eyes to bring order out of the disorder of her home. The whole family were more respectably and comfortably dressed, and the child, having found that she looked, as she expressed it, "like other little girls," was fast losing the painful shyness that had made her seem dull and awkward, and growing as frank, bright and merry as a child could be.

Sam began to feel a to him novel sense of brotherly pride in her as she came running out to meet him when he came from work, her sunny face lifted to his and her rosy lips brimming over with talk. He called her "My Susie" occasionally, with a pleasant sense of proprietorship in her

increasing sweetness and prettiness, and it added not a little to his hopefulness and self-respect that she looked so nicely, and that his work was procuring these comforts for her.

She gratified him, too, by the way in which she brought to him all her wishes and plans, and her perfect confidence in his skill, ability and knowledge. We are so influenced by the judgment of others that few of us can be even very self-reliant when no one else relies upon us, and though Sam was scarcely conscious of it, yet Susie's abounding faith in him added something to his own faith in himself, and made him stronger in hope and courage. They were growing to be the best of *friends*, this brother and sister, and that is what many brothers and sisters, even not unloving ones, are not.

The two boys were silent for a little while. Kent was considering Sam's air-castle, and trying to decide what the probable results would be if it could indeed be brought down to earth and converted into a veritable village grocery.

"After all," he said, soberly, "I suppose a good many would go up to Favisham's just for something to drink, if they didn't go for anything else."

"Yes, that's so," Sam admitted. "The ones

that's really bound to drink will do it, and I don't see as anybody can stop 'em. But there's some, like Tim Nolan, now, that want to stop it. They know it hurts 'em, and they won't touch it for a good while at once, until they go where it is or somebody offers it to 'em; then the liking is too strong, and the first thing they know, they're drunk again. They'd keep clear of Favisham's pretty much altogether if they didn't have to go there for groceries. As for the other sort, if it didn't stop their drinking any, a new store would help their families a good deal. You see if it was handy, so the women folks could come for things themselves, they'd get a good share of the money that's earned to buy with, while now the men take all their wages Saturday night up to Favisham's. They drink, treat and pay bills till they don't have much left to buy anything to take home by the time they're ready to start, and they're so drunk, besides, that they don't care; that's about how it goes."

"I suppose so, and Favisham understands it all and knows just what they are dong. I don't see how he can be willing to keep up such a wretched business!" Kent exclaimed, in indignant wonder.

"Well, he makes money at it," Sam answered, coolly.

“Makes money!” exclaimed Kent, indignantly; “money isn’t everything.”

“But it brings almost everything, money does,” said Sam, taking a practical view of the matter.

“I remember hearing an old minister once say that, after all, we just made out of it one of two things,” answered Kent, slowly—“either wings that would help us heavenward or a millstone that would hang about our necks and drag us down to destruction.”

Sam made no reply, and, after a moment or two, Kent arose, and remarking that he had yet to ride into town that evening and it was quite time he had started, walked away.

Sam watched him until he was out of sight, and sat there quite still for some time after, his head resting upon his hand. At last a light gleaming out through the window broke upon his reverie, and looking up, he saw that Susie had placed a lamp upon the table near which he usually sat with his books. He went in then, and drawing a chair to his accustomed place, took up a book and began turning over the leaves a little absently.

“Isn’t that the right book? This is the one you had last night,” said Susie, bringing another volume and laying it down beside him.

But this was Saturday night, and remembering the next day's Bible lesson, he turned from other studies to look at that. He had quite outgrown his dislike to the Bible class; going at first to please Miss Crail, he went now because it pleased himself. He liked the knowledge of history, of ancient life and customs that he could gain there, and he found that talking with some one else about such things was, for once in the week at least, a pleasant change from studying alone.

He glanced over the chapter, and presently these words caught his eye and held it for a moment: "For here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." They brought a vague unrest, a feeling of discomfort, or rather deepened it, perhaps, since it was Kent's last words that had awakened the train of thought that troubled him. It was not a new feeling; he had stilled it or turned from it more than once before. Amid all his efforts to improve his outward life and circumstances, he was not willing yet to acknowledge higher aims and duties. Full of his new ambitions, hopes and plans for this world, the thought of another, where no advantages of wealth or position gained here would avail him anything, was unwelcome. He was not ready to confess himself "a

pilgrim and stranger," and yet, however unwished for, some suggestion of the life beyond kept meeting him on every hand. He was constantly reminded that, whether he desired it or not, he could have here "no continuing city."

Should he "seek one to come"? He was counting the cost, though unconsciously; not that he had any "great possessions," but he hoped to have. It may be found at last of many a one that he would have been willing to have given up all that he *had*, and yet have lost heaven for the sake of some glittering dream that was just before him.

While he sat there thinking, studying, trying to learn the lesson without learning it, Teddy came in, noisy and much elated, jumped over the low rocking-chair that stood in his way, flung his hat upon the table and remarked,

"I know some good news, I tell you!"

"What?" asked Susie. His mother paused in her sewing, and Sam turned around and looked at him.

"Well, 'tain't anything so very great, either, only I'm goin' to turn storekeeper."

Susie's black eyes opened to their widest extent, and Teddy, perceiving that he was making an impression, proceeded:

"I'm goin' to clerk for Favisham."

"What are you talking about?" asked Sam.

"What do you mean?"

"Mean just what I say," answered Teddy, drawing himself up with an air of importance. "You see I went up to the store after that corn-meal, and they was busy up there and said I'd have to wait, so I set down. Bime-by they wanted some candle boxes moved in out of the way, and I helped fetch 'em in. Mr. Favisham says, 'You're a pretty smart fellow, ain't you?' and I told him I guessed I was. Then he said they'd been thinking they'd like to get a good boy to help 'em now and then, and he didn't know but I'd do as well as anybody, and asked me how I'd like to be a storekeeper. I said, 'First rate.' He said he didn't care about me all the time, only nights, after school and Saturdays—'specially Saturdays, when there's a good many in after drinks. He wanted me to learn to wait on 'em, and to help round other ways. He said if I'd come up every night after school and every Saturday, he'd give me seventy-five cents a week ;" and Teddy put his hands into his pockets as if he felt plenty of money already there.

"Well, you won't go," said Sam, emphatically.

"Won't?" Teddy forgot his newly-assumed

dignity in his astonishment, and opened his eyes as wide as Susie's had opened at his first announcement.

"Not if I have anything to say about it, and I rather think I have," Sam added.

Teddy considered a moment. Sam had had something to say about a good many things lately, and he did not think it quite wise to advance the opinion that he would not about this, so he remarked, a little less confidently :

"I don't see why. I should think you might be glad to have me get the money."

"Money isn't everything," Sam answered, almost unconsciously repeating Kent's words.

"Humph! 'Pears to me you try hard enough to earn it, if it ain't worth much," said Teddy, rather indignantly.

"I didn't say it wasn't worth much, I said it wasn't everything, and what money I do get I'll get honestly, anyhow, and not in any such mean work as that. You think it would be a fine thing to go up to Favisham's and help him sell whisky. It wouldn't be long before you'd be as big a drunkard as any of 'em, and your seventy-five cents wouldn't pay for the whisky you'd drink. Ted Cresly, if you haven't seen enough of that sort of

thing to last you your lifetime, then I can tell you that I have, that's all!"

He spoke with a bitter energy so unlike his usual tone that Teddy was startled, and preserved an amazed silence for a few seconds. But his boyish sense of importance had been flattered by the proposition made to him, and the offered money—no small amount in his eyes—was too tempting to be readily relinquished.

"No; I wouldn't drink, neither; I guess I've got more sense'n that!" he said, half petulantly, half persuasively. "I wouldn't never touch it, Sam."

"And if you didn't, you'd help Favisham sell it to other folks, and send 'em staggering home like Tim Nolan did to-night. You'd help him get rich on the money they'd ought to buy their folks something to eat with, and let 'em go home drunk and crazy, to knock their wives and children about and turn 'em out of doors. You've tried that yourself; how did you like it?"

"Oh no, no, Teddy! you mustn't do it!" exclaimed Mrs. Cresly, seeming suddenly to comprehend the proposition, and for once rousing from her listlessness into trembling dread and terror, as if some past agony were rising from its grave and threatening to come back into her life again. "It

ain't no better than murder, Teddy—it's worse; it kills a hundred times over. Don't you go there! don't have nothing to do with it."

"He sha'n't," said Sam, decidedly. "Favisham has done enough for our family that way; he'd better let us alone now."

Teddy stood still. He remembered the old days of watching and dreading for his father to come, the blows and abuse, and the nights when he and Susie had been obliged to seek shelter with the neighbors or wander about out of doors for hours, not daring to venture into the house. Susie did not look then as she did now; he glanced at her, and noticed the change. He recalled the many days when they had had but little to eat, and remembered how gloomy Sam had looked, how anxious and frightened his mother had been. He thought of that last night when the horribly mutilated body had been brought home cold and stiff. Yes, drink had done it all: even his childish brain could understand that clearly. Teddy's resolution was taken. He picked up his cap and quietly walked out of the house.

Sam turned to his book again and tried to study, but excited feeling held its sway, and would not pass at once. How dared they make such an offer

to Teddy? Did they want to make him what his father had been? Well, they did not mean that, perhaps; they only did not care, that was all. They wanted their work done, and what concern was it of theirs what the effect might be upon the boy? They ought to care, though. Kent Graham was right: money was not everything! What if the old burden should come back to his life again—not a drunken father, but brother? The very thought struck with strange chill and gloom through all his hopes and dreams, and called up for a moment a sickening vision. Then he banished it, and smiled a little at himself as one sometimes does on awakening frightened from a dream. No, it would not be; yet glancing again at the Bible verse that had first attracted his attention, after all, this was not really a satisfactory world in which to have a “continuing city.” There were so many awful possibilities in it!

In little more than half an hour Teddy came back.

“I’ve done it,” he said.

“Done what?” asked Susie.

“Told Favisham.”

“You haven’t been up there?” interrupted Sam, surprise and a little dismay in his voice.

“Yes, I have,” answered Teddy. “Thought I might as well have done with it, ’cause, you see, I told him before I guessed I’d come; now I told him I wouldn’t, and no guess about it.”

“What did he say?” asked Susie, curiously.

“Didn’t say nothing much. I went in, and says I, ‘Mr. Favisham, I can’t help you sell whisky.’ ‘Why, you have changed your mind in a hurry! What’s the matter?’ he says. And I told him, ‘’Cause I don’t care about getting to be an old toper myself, and anyhow, it’s a mean business getting away men’s money that they’d oughter buy their folks something to eat with, and giving ’em whisky to drink so they come home drunk and tear round and break things and scare everybody. It’s a mean business, and ’tain’t honest. Sam says so, and he says I sha’n’t come, and I don’t want to, besides.’

“He didn’t say nothing at all, only there was a lot of men in there, and some of ’em laughed, so I came away. Just as I came out, though, a man that had been in there came out after me. He was all dressed up and had a carpet-bag—some stranger waiting for the train, I guess—and says he, ‘Little boy, you’re right; stick to that.’ Then he laughed and said he’d paid a quarter more’n once to hear a

temperance speech, and mine was a pretty good one, so he'd give me a quarter to remember it by. Here it is;" and Teddy exhibited the coin. "A real bright, new shiner, ain't it? It's got a hole in it, and you can put a string through it, Susie, and wear it round your neck till I want to buy something with it."

Sam had not thought of his words being repeated to Mr. Favisham, and the way in which Teddy had done it might make him an enemy. Still, the boy had not thought of anything except giving the real reason for not taking the offered place, and whether Mr. Favisham disliked it or not, it was only the plain, simple truth. Sam could not decide that he wished Teddy's words unspoken, and so he said nothing about it.



CHAPTER XIII.

KENT GRAHAM rode back to the city thoughtfully, wishing, planning, studying, and though his thoughts traveled much farther and faster than he did, they had yet reached no satisfactory conclusion when he had reached his destination. The shutters, at home, had not yet been closed, and the light from the bright rooms streamed out cheerfully. Glancing up at one of the windows, Kent saw a girlish face framed there—somebody watching for him—and after a moment's wondering he guessed who it must be, and sprang in to greet his cousin Vernie. He was right. It was her bright face that turned to meet him as he entered, and he noticed with satisfaction that she did not seem to be in traveling-dress and had quite a settled and at-home air.

“Now, are you just going somewhere, and have only stopped for the night? or did you really come to see us?” he asked.

“I have really come to stay for a week or two—if you want me,” she answered, laughing.

"Certainly we want you," said her uncle, lifting a handful of her shining curls and letting them fall again. "We don't get you very often, though, and we shall be sure to keep you as long as we can now."

"You deserve a vote of thanks!" Kent said, merrily. "If I had known you were here, I would have been home long ago."

"Oh, I haven't been here long," Vernie replied—"only about two hours. I didn't think of coming at all until yesterday—that is, not of coming so soon; I'd meant to come a month or two later. But Lucie Austin had been with us for her two weeks' vacation, and was going back to school, and mamma said I might come part of the way with her, if I liked, and make my visit here. She thought it would be pleasanter than to wait until midsummer, when the weather would be so warm that I couldn't go about much, and in the fall I can't very well leave home, if Lewis should go away."

"Lewis? where is he going?"

"He is going to the Sandwich Islands, maybe. Didn't he write to you about it? I thought boys always told one another such things in their letters: girls do."

“But I haven’t had a letter from Lewis for two months.”

“Haven’t you? That is the reason, then; he didn’t know it himself so long ago as that. Lucie Austin came from there, you know—the Sandwich Islands, I mean. She is real nice, Kent, and I like her very much,” said Vernie, breaking off in the middle of her explanation to speak of her friend. “I was half afraid I shouldn’t, but I do. We all like her, and watch for her holidays almost as if she belonged to us. Well, she has told us a great deal about her home and the people and life there, and Lew has asked so many questions, and been so much interested in her stories, that I think she must have written to her father about it. She laughs, and says she has told him about us all. At any rate, papa had a letter from him about a month ago, thanking him and mamma for making Lucie’s school-life so pleasant, and offering to take Lewis into his business there and give him a good position if they were willing to let him go. He intends coming to see Lucie next fall, he says, and the matter can be decided then.”

“Lewis wants to go, I suppose?” said Kent, remembering his cousin’s desire for change and adventure.

"Yes," answered Vernie, a little shadow flitting over her face. "I shouldn't think he would want to go so far away from us all, but he does. Jasper isn't a bit like that."

"Jasper is younger, and then he is different naturally. It isn't that Lew wants to go away from his friends; he only wants to see new places and things, and to do new work," said Kent, quickly, anxious to soothe the touch of wounded feeling that had betrayed itself in her words.

"Yes, Lewis is older—almost sixteen," she answered, slowly. "I suppose it would be nice to travel about and see what the rest of the world is like, only I should want everybody I loved to go with me if I were going. However, it is not decided yet about Lew's going, though papa says Mr. Austin has made a very kind offer."

Then came the summons to supper, and Kent, delighted at having their well-served and elegant, but usually somewhat lonely, table gladdened by Vernie's bright presence, put away, for the time, the thoughts that had busied him during his ride, and devoted himself to her entertainment. Mr. Graham was almost equally pleased in his quiet way. Vernie had always been a favorite with him, and her light step and clear voice seemed to awaken

the great rooms to new life. Yet that same voice and step, and the half-childish, half-womanly presence, called a sigh to his lips more than once during the evening.

Kent and Vernie had always been the best of friends. Perhaps because he had no sister of his own, and had never been accustomed to such girlish sympathy and assistance in his plans and projects, he appreciated it more highly than even Lewis or Jasper seemed to do, and though Vernie would have indignantly resented any suggestion that they were not the kindest of brothers, yet he could not help recalling the old thought sometimes that they did not really know how much had been given them.

The two sat by the study-table that evening looking over books, engravings and drawings, and pausing for many an interlude of chat.

"Do you know," said Vernie, taking up the sketch of a ruined mill, "that I have never seen Uncle Graham's mills? Either I have not been going to stay long enough, or something has happened to prevent my going out whenever I have been here; at any rate, I have never gone there."

"Never have been out to Clannyford? You must go this time, then!" said Kent, enthusias-

tically. "I want you to see the mills, and go about and see what the place is like, too. Besides, you must visit Aunt Gray; you can't help liking her."

"You will have to take care of yourself, Vernie," said Mr. Graham, looking up from his book with a smile, "or Kent will take you here, there and everywhere until you are quite tired out. I don't think he knows what tired means himself."

Vernie laughed.

"I want to go and see Aunt Gray," she said. "Mamma wanted me to visit her if I could. She talks about her often, but I don't remember her very well; I haven't seen her since I was six years old."

"She will be glad to see you, and I know you will like her," said Kent. "I always stay at her house when I am at Clannyford; it seems almost as much home to me as this does."

"Mamma says Aunt Gray is one of the best women she ever knew," said Vernie, slowly, and a shadow crept over her face, and for a few moments she was silent and thoughtful.

The evening wore away pleasantly, but when it came to its close, and they were separating for the

night, Vernie experienced her first feeling of homesickness in missing the accustomed evening worship. The old housekeeper showed her to her room, pleasant and careful for her comfort as she always was.

“It seems cheery to have you here, Miss Vernie, and I hope you’ll be content to stop a while. A house with no mistress, young or old, isn’t just the brightest. I’m pretty well used to it now this many years, but I think it’s a bit dreary for Master Kent sometimes—though maybe he hardly knows what it misses, being too young to remember old days like his father. I’m glad you’ve come, and I think you’ll find your room all comfortable. Good-night, my dear.”

“It is all very nice, thank you. Good-night,” Vernie answered. Yet when the door had closed and she was alone, she threw herself down in the great cushioned chair beside her with something very like a sigh.

“It is nice,” she said, as if thinking aloud, glancing about the handsomely furnished apartment; “everything about the place is beautiful, and they are all just as kind as can be, but it is so strange, cold and unhomelike to have no prayer! It seems just like leaving the day all

at loose ends. I'd be afraid any good thing that was put into it would all ravel out."

She leaned her head upon her hand for a minute, then she moved her chair nearer to the light and opened the little Bible she had brought from home with her.

"Oh, I wish that I *knew* I were a Christian!" she said. The doubt shadowed both her reading and her prayer. There were so many sweet, full, precious promises that she found her heart growing warm and glad over them; then came the chilling thought: "But these are meant for Christians, and I am not sure that I am one." And so it happened that she fell asleep at last with tears on her lashes.

Monday morning dawned clear and bright, with April's soft air and coaxing sunlight. Vernie, enjoying all its loveliness, could not help reflecting some of its brightness, and wandered about the house and grounds with sparkling eye and smiling lip. The day was so beautiful that it seemed as if she must be glad in it, and yet, when her clear laugh would ring out so easily, she checked herself sometimes with a self-reproachful doubt whether she had any right to feel so happy. Ah, Vernie, Vernie! trying to take God's gift to you

and lay it up on a high shelf, out of reach, until your hands shall be worthy to hold it, as if He who gave it did not know!

"Suppose we go out to Clannyford?" said Kent. "It is just the day for a ride, and perhaps we shall not have another as pleasant. Will you go, father? Can't you?"

"Not to-day, very well; Vernie will excuse me, I guess. How will you go, Kent?"

Kent looked at his cousin.

"We might take the carriage. I didn't think about it; I am so used to going out on Lio. Do you ride, Vernie?"

"To think of asking a farmer's daughter that!" laughed Vernie. "Surely I do."

"Then, if you prefer going in that way, I will speak to Jim about a horse for you," her uncle said, and Vernie ran away to make ready.

Mr. Graham went down the avenue with them, and watched them as they passed out into the road. "Take good care of her, Kent," he said, with a wave of good-bye and a smile.

It was, as Kent had said, just the day for a pleasant ride. He was in high spirits, and entertained his young companion with descriptions of the place to which they were going and the

various people there who were his own particular friends and favorites. The two miles seemed short to them both, and when they were fairly in the village, Vernie was questioning doubtfully whether that could be Clannyford.

"Clannyford, indeed, and here is Aunt Gray's. We haven't been very long in coming," her cousin answered.

The old lady greeted them cordially.

"Hetty Mead's daughter!" she said, in reply to Kent's introduction, holding Vernie's hand in a warm clasp and looking with earnest, kindly gaze into the flushing face. "You are very like your mother, my dear, as she was when I knew her first." She stooped and kissed her, and Vernie's heart was won at once. She was well pleased to answer all the questions about her home and the dear ones there that were asked with such sincere and loving interest.

"Vernie came out here partly for the sake of visiting father's noisy old pet down by the river," said Kent, at length. "Won't you go, too, aunty? It is lovely out of doors."

"I know it is, but I am not feeling very strong to-day. I seldom walk as far as that now."

She had grown thinner and weaker during the

past winter. Kent noticed it with a sudden, quickened perception of what had been transpiring before his eyes.

"You are not sick, aunty?" he asked, a little anxiously.

"Oh no, not really sick, but I cannot expect to be very well or vigorous now. I am getting to be an old woman, my dear."

Kent's eyes moistened, though he scarcely knew why. He laughed to hide it.

"You are just as dear and handsome as ever," he said.

She smiled and laid her hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"After visiting the factory you must both come back and take tea with me before you go home."

"I should like that," said Vernie, eagerly.

"And Kent always likes it," Mrs. Gray added, with a pleasant glance toward "her boy."

It was all new to Vernie—the roar and crash of the great manufactory, the ceaseless roll of its wheels and the steady working of all its ponderous machinery. A feeling of awe stole over her. It almost seemed as though she had entered the cave of some great giant, and the workers toiling there with such regular, monotonous movement were his

slaves held there in dreary bondage. Kent watched it all with keen, interested eyes, turning toward her, now and then, with some shouted explanation which she could only partly catch by the motion of his lips. It was all wonderful and interesting, yet she drew a long breath of relief when they passed out into the open air again. At a little distance from the building she paused and looked back.

"It seems strange how any one could have planned out all that," she said.

"One did not," Kent answered, quickly. "It is the work of a great many different brains, in many different lifetimes, all gathered there. It is that which makes it seem so wonderful to me sometimes. Just think, Vernie, how some one has studied and worked and planned over a single one of those inventions, and then sent it out into the world to work on after he is dead, to be improved by others and made useful in ways he never thought of."

Vernie paused a moment over that thought.

"Yes, it is all strange, great and wonderful," she said, at last, "but for all that I could not help pitying those people shut up in those great dark, noisy rooms this bright day."

"They are used to it. It is their daily work. They earn their living so, and appear very well satisfied."

"Yes, I know, but it would seem good if every body could live in the light."

Some deeper meaning lying in her own words flashed across her then, and she was silent. Reaching Mrs. Gray's again, Kent left her for a little while. He wanted to go to the woods and search for some violets under Teddy Cresly's guidance. Teddy had informed them that there were some already in bloom.

Vernie was well content to stay, and she and Mrs. Gray grew from acquaintanceship into friendship in their two hours' talk. The girl questioned about her mother as Mrs. Gray had first known her long years before.

"And it is five years since you saw her last. It don't seem to me that mamma grows old a bit. I'd like to have you see her now," she said, with loving enthusiasm.

"I would like it, too, dear, but I cannot unless she comes to see me, and I suppose her life is too busy to allow her leaving home often. Perhaps she will come some day, but if not, the Father's house with its 'many mansions' lies only a little

way beyond, and there will be such glad meetings as we can only dream of here."

So full of rest and peace her face was that Vernie, watching it, found her troubling thought springing to her lips.

"Oh, Aunt Gray, I wish I were a Christian!" She paused, wishing, for one instant, the words recalled.

"And are you not one, Vernie?" asked Mrs. Gray, very kindly and without seeming at all surprised.

"I don't know. No, I suppose I'm not," Vernie answered, sorrowfully. "At least, I am sure I have never felt as a great many people feel."

Mrs. Gray smiled:

"It is not very probable that you have. Think how many people there are in the world, and no two characters precisely alike."

"But about this one thing, I mean," said Vernie. "Christians feel alike in this—that they trust in the Saviour, love him and desire to serve him."

"Do not you feel this?"

"Yes," slowly and a little doubtfully; then, with a sudden resolve to give her confidence unservedly, she said, "I'll tell you how it is, Aunt Gray: I don't even know when I first learned to call

God our Father; I have been taught of Jesus ever since I can remember, that he was the dearest, wisest, greatest, most loving Friend I had; that I must ask him for everything I wanted, tell him everything I was glad of or sorry for, and that he would hear and help me. It has seemed natural to do it always, to think of him as my Saviour. I know I am a sinner—I couldn't help knowing that when I find it out so often—but I knew it was sinners that Christ came to save, and that, after all, he must do it all for us; we cannot do anything to save ourselves, though, if we love him, we will try to do those things that please him."

"Well?" said Mrs. Gray as she paused.

"Well, one day, a few weeks before I came here, I went over to old Mr. Simms' to carry a message from mother to his sister. She wasn't at home, and he asked me to sit down a little while until she came. While I was waiting for her he asked me if I had ever 'experienced religion.' I thought about it a minute, and I wasn't quite sure what he meant, so I told him I didn't know. 'Ah! if you had, you would know,' he said, and then he told me about himself. He thought he should be lost. He suffered so that he couldn't sleep for it, and then afterward, when God had heard him, he was so

happy that he thought he would like to die right away. I never felt like that.

"He is a real good man," added Vernie, earnestly, as she saw a faint smile on Mrs. Gray's lips at her last words.

"I do not doubt it, my dear, nor that God has drawn him to himself. But our God has many ways of calling his children. Do you think that John, to whom the Saviour only said, 'Follow me,' and he left all and followed him, was any less a true disciple than Paul, who was stopped on his journey of persecution by a dazzling light and a voice from heaven?"

"Oh no," answered Vernie, her face brightening.

"And suppose you had passed through all those experiences of which Mr. Simms told, what more could you feel at last than that Jesus is the greatest and best of friends, willing to love and save you?"

"But, Aunt Gray," said Vernie, with a shadow of doubt in her voice, "might it not be that I feel that way because I have always been taught so?"

"Perhaps you do—I do not think it makes much difference *why* it is, if it only *is*—but do you not think your education and circumstances

may have been just as much God's appointed way of drawing you to him?"

A quick light came to Vernie's eyes.

"What Mr. Simms said to me that day has been troubling me now and then ever since. I am happy naturally, I think, but it would keep coming back to me, sometimes, that maybe I had no right to be—not any right to feel such a glad thrill when the days were bright, when they sang the hymns I like best in church, or when I read some Bible chapters, and I couldn't feel as he said he did."

"And so you were trying to hold back the loving, grateful feelings that were God's voice in your heart? Ah, Vernie, never do that! The Bible does not anywhere say, 'feel like John,' or Paul, or any one else; the command is only, 'Come unto me,' 'Follow me.' Obey it, dear, as happily as you can, and trust him to give you all the 'experiences' you need."

Vernie looked up with a smile, though some tears, not sorrowful ones, stood in her eyes. Mrs. Gray saw that the cloud had passed, and she left her alone for a little while, and went out to make her preparations for an early supper that her young guests might start homeward before dark.

Presently, Kent came in from his walk in the woods, his hands full of beautiful, delicate violets, and delivered them to Vernie's delighted possession. Mrs. Gray came in for a moment to admire them.

"They seem like the very breath of spring," she said.

Vernie busied herself with arranging them into two bouquets—one to leave with Mrs. Gray and the other to carry back to her uncle's—while Kent filled vases with water to receive them.

Supper over, they prepared to depart.

"You must try and come again, Vernie, before you go home," Mrs. Gray said, standing in the low doorway.

"I will if I can," Vernie answered, returning warmly her kiss.

Kent looked back as they rode away.

"I am almost afraid she is sick; it seems to me that she looks paler than she used to. You like her, Vernie?"

"Like her!" Vernie looked as though she thought that scarcely the right word. "Yes, indeed, more than that! I'm very glad I came."

It was a sweetly happy face that she carried back to the city that night, and that brightened

the great rooms in Mr. Graham's house all the evening. The old housekeeper noticed it:

"The ride has done you good, Miss Vernie; your face is so bright and cheery."

"I had a pleasant time. Yes, I'm very, very glad I went," said Vernie, again.

She told her Saviour how glad that night, drawing near to him in loving gratitude, and no longer afraid that he might question the way by which she had come.



CHAPTER XIV.

HERNIE'S visit ended and she at home again, Kent, a little lonely, returned to his accustomed pursuits and interests, and the thought that had been only partially put aside came back to claim his earnest attention. It did not seem to be of much use to think about it, he acknowledged to himself; he did not see that there was anything he could do, yet he still kept thinking.

"Oh, there is something that I wish could be done, but I do not see any way to do it," he said to Mrs. Gray one day.

"Perhaps it is something that is just as well, or better, left undone," she answered.

"I don't know," Kent replied, thoughtfully. "It does not seem so; it seems as though it might do a great deal of good."

"Do you believe in our Saviour's 'whatsoever,' Kent?"

Kent looked at her questioningly.

“‘Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son.’

“‘Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you.’

“‘Whatsoever’ is a broad, strong word, Kent; it covers a great deal. If your ‘something’ is a good thing, how do you know that it does not cover that also?” she asked.

And after that Kent did more than think; he prayed.

“Father,” said Kent, one morning, when Mr. Graham and himself were together in the library, “don’t you think it would be a good plan for some one to open a store at Clannyford?”

“Grocery?” asked Mr. Graham, laying down his paper.

“Yes, sir—well, that is, a few dry goods too—a real country store. There is none there, you know.”

“No,” the gentleman answered, thoughtfully, looking somewhat interested. “I do not know that I ever thought of it before, but I believe it would be a good location. There are all the mill families, and with the exception of sending to town

occasionally, I suppose they have to go up to the station—nearly a mile—for everything.”

“And there is only the one store when they get there,” said Kent.

“True. Yes, I think some enterprising merchant might find a good opening at Clannyford and do well. Have you heard of any one about starting there?”

“Oh no,” Kent answered.

“What put it into your head, then?” asked his father, a little curiously.

“Sam Cresly,” answered Kent, laughing. “We were talking, two or three weeks ago, about the people buying from Favisham’s. It is so far that the men have most of them to go for things themselves on Saturday nights, and then many of them get to drinking, and spend what they have in that way, instead of buying for their families. Sam was saying that if he could he would have a store in Clannyford where there should be no liquor sold. It would be nearer, and if a good one, would draw most of the mill custom, so that whoever opened it could do well, and at the same time it would be a great benefit to the people themselves.”

“Probably it might. That young Cresly is an intelligent, shrewd, industrious fellow; I have no-

ticed him a number of times lately. Wasn't it his father that was killed on the railroad?—run over by the cars?"

"Yes, sir, up at Favisham's. He had been drinking."

"So I was thinking. It is little wonder that Sam is bitterly opposed to liquor-selling; he has good cause. I am glad that he bids fair to turn out so differently from his father." Mr. Graham took up his newspaper again.

Kent was disappointed. His father had discussed the subject as something not at all concerning himself, and he did not quite see how to renew the conversation and state what he wanted. Indeed, he scarcely knew what he did want. He had had a vague idea that his father might become interested in the matter, and himself propose some plan for opening a store in the village that would benefit the place, and at the same time afford Sam a situation. He did not doubt that he could easily make some such arrangement, but he had gone back to his report of congressional proceedings and seemed to think no more about it.

"But then he does not know them all as I do. He does not know who are trying to get along and keep from drinking, and who are struggling

and suffering. It is only natural that he should be less interested," he said to himself. Yet he was disappointed, and when the school-hour came, he walked away with a slower step than usual.

The busy hours that followed banished the scheme for a time, but he could not quite decide that its fulfillment was impossible, and until he did, he could not drive all thought of it away. So it happened that when at home again in the evening, with a book containing the next morning's lesson before him, he was neither reading nor studying, but looking quite beyond it.

His father turned from the desk where he had been writing, and watched him for a few moments, with a smile :

"Well, Kent?"

The boy started.

"Ancient history did not have the benefit of that long reverie, I am afraid ; what was it?"

Kent glanced at his book.

"No, I had forgotten all about the history. I was thinking"—hesitating a little—"of Sam Cresly and some of the Clannyford people."

"And a new store," added Mr. Graham.

Kent suddenly colored and looked up surprised and half questioningly.

Mr. Graham met the glance with a steady, serious one for a moment.

"I will tell you what I will do, Kent," he said. "I do not wish to enter into any new business enterprise myself: I have enough to attend to now, and sufficient income to satisfy me; but if you think a store at Clannyford would not only pay for itself, but be also a great benefit to the place and people, and if you really care enough about having one there to undertake the business yourself—the planning, responsibility and trouble—you can do so."

"Myself?" repeated Kent, wonderingly.

"I mean this: I will give you five hundred dollars to invest; you can engage young Cresly as your assistant or in any capacity you like, and manage the experiment to suit yourselves. I do not give any larger sum than that, because I think you will be much more likely to succeed by working slowly and carefully, and not attempting too much at first, but only enlarging your operations when the proceeds of your business will allow you to do so. Besides, I think that amount of money is about what the experience may be worth to you, even if your project should prove unsuccessful. For a store-room you might use, if you liked, the old warehouse. It is a central location, and now

that the new one, so much larger, is built near the mill, it is not particularly needed. You can have it for one year rent free, and after that, if the store should still be in existence, we can make some arrangement about it."

Kent was silent for several minutes.

"You are very kind, father. Oh dear! I scarcely know what to think about it," he said, at last.

"You must take time to think," his father answered. "You need not decide at once, and, of course, you need not accept the offer unless you choose. One thing, Kent—it is not to break in upon your school course, you know; you must arrange so as to avoid anything of the kind."

Kent did think. He was pleased, surprised, perplexed, a little anxious even already at the responsibility that might be his. He felt somewhat doubtful about accepting it at first; it did not seem so easy and sure a way to benefit Clannyford as when he had thought of some one else undertaking it. Still, had it not come as an answer to his prayer?—a fulfillment of the promised "whatsoever"? After all, thinking it over, there was something pleasant in the idea of having the enterprise only Sam's and his own—the store to be theirs, planned and arranged by themselves. It

aroused his boyish enthusiasm and energy, and at last he mounted Lio and rode out to talk over the matter with Sam.

It was a warm, pleasant spring evening, and the two boys, going out to the river side, walked up and down along the shore while Kent explained the proposition that had been made. Sam listened with sparkling eye and interested face.

"It's what I'd do if I had money of my own, but then, you see, risking borrowed money is a different thing. Your father—" he said, hesitatingly.

"But it isn't to be borrowed money at all," Kent interrupted. "He will give it to me, and he says he thinks the experience will be worth that even if we fail. So, you see, the money is mine, and I want you to go into partnership with me."

"That ain't fair, either," said Sam. "You have all the capital and I can't put in anything; that's no way for a fellow to go into partnership."

"Experience balances capital sometimes," Kent suggested.

"But I have no experience, either," persisted Sam.

"Well, your common sense then, or whatever you choose to call it," said Kent, laughing. "You know the plan was your own in the first place,

Sam, and you know a great deal more about it than I do, anyway. More than half the trouble and planning and work will be yours, too, so don't bother any more about that."

They discussed the project pro and con, and viewed it in all the light in which it was presented to their eyes with more of bright expectation and buoyant hopefulness in their discussion, no doubt, than they might have known had they been older.

"I'd like to see the inside of the warehouse; what kind of a room is it?" said Sam, surveying the outside of that building with new interest as they walked back through the village street. "It's a good while since I've been in it, and I sort of forget what it's like."

"I can easily get the key from Mr. Crail," Kent answered. "Wait a minute, and we will go in and see what it is like. It is almost empty now, I believe."

He crossed the road, walked a short distance up the street to Mr. Crail's house, and presently returned with the key. Sam, however, was missing, and Kent looked about wonderingly, but in a moment or two his companion reappeared.

"I just thought we couldn't see anything after

we got in without some kind of a light, so I went home and got a bit of candle," he explained.

Kent unlocked the door; they went in and closed it behind them; then Sam drew a match from his pocket, and proceeded to illuminate the place, so far as his small taper could produce that effect.

It was a room twenty-five or thirty feet in length, not very wide nor particularly lofty, yet quite large enough for their purpose. Sam looked about him with a growing expression of satisfaction.

"It'll do first rate!" he said, approvingly. "We must get the place all cleared out, some shelves and a counter put up and some painting done. I'll tell you what, Kent, I can do a great deal of that work myself."

"Of course you can, as well as anybody," Kent assented, readily.

"I can do it evenings. If it does take some longer, why we ain't in any great hurry, and it will save the money some. Yes, sir," surveying the apartment from one end to the other; "it will be a nice place when it's fixed up. We'll start a store in Clannyford, and make the most we can."

"Fairly and honestly," added Kent.

"Yes, fair and honest is the word. We won't cheat nor sell whisky," said Sam, emphatically.

Kent went home and accepted his father's offer. There were frequent trips out to Clannyford and numerous consultations in the weeks that followed. They obtained possession of the store-room, and Sam worked busily in the evenings and whenever he had any spare time, cheerful, hopeful and deeply interested in his work. He had considerable taste and ingenuity as well as mechanical skill, and he expended no little labor and care in arranging everything as nicely as possible. Kent closely watched the progress of the work, admired and commended.

For a time they kept their purpose secret, but it could not long remain so in a village like Clannyford. The alterations in the old warehouse and Sam's employment there were soon noticed and commented upon. Questions were asked and surmises made, and before long it was generally understood that a new store was to be opened.

"It will be a great convenience, if it only is a good one," was the common expression in regard to it. There was some shaking of heads and smiling wonderment over the young proprietors, but it was not known exactly how they came in that position, and Mr. Graham's known wealth was suggestive of a sufficiency of funds if the enterprise

were, as many supposed, really his. The boys kept their own counsel, only averring that the store was to be theirs.

"We will have to settle some plans about when we'll be open," said Sam, one night. "You know how 'tis, Kent; I've got my folks to look after, and it won't do to give up my place in the mill till I've got something sure to depend on."

Kent assented.

"Now, I'll tell you what I've been thinking," Sam continued. "We might have the store open for an hour in the mornings, before time to go to work: I could easy get up early enough for that; then another hour at noon, and keep it open in the evenings."

"But wouldn't the people be likely to want articles during the rest of the day, and go up to Favisham's?" asked Kent, doubtfully.

"They wouldn't much; it's too far off. You see it's different from what it would be if there was another store in the place. Most times they'd rather wait a little than walk a mile for what they want, and besides, they would soon get used to it, and remember to get things when the store is open. A good deal of the selling is done in the evening, anyhow."

"Yes, I suppose that is so," Kent answered, thoughtfully; "so many of the people work in the mill through the day. We might do this, Sam—have some little bills printed and put up, stating at what hours the store will be open, and then it will be fairly understood."

"That's the idea!" said Sam, giving a finishing touch of paint to the drawer he was busy with. "When we're about ready to open, we'll do that."

Teddy Cresly came to the door, and finding it not fastened, walked in.

"Halloa! here you are! Goin' to look spel-en-did, ain't it?" he exclaimed, surveying the premises. Teddy was greatly delighted with the prospect of "our store," and was by no means an infrequent or unappreciative visitor. "You fellers had better keep lots of peanuts; peanuts takes, I tell you!" he added, with the air of one whose experience was worth something.

Kent laughed.

"Come, Ted, help pick up some of these brushes and things and put 'em away; I'm 'most ready to go home now," said Sam.

As they stood in the doorway, preparing to depart, one of the mill men, passing up the street, stopped.

"Well, how does the new store come on?" he asked, with a bluff sort of kindness.

"All right; be ready to start before long, I guess," Sam answered.

The man put his head in at the door and took a brief glance by the aid of the light Sam had not yet extinguished.

"Oh yes; you're gettin' things into shape. I hope you'll do well at it." Then he added, with a laugh, "Goin' to give a treat the day you open up? Free glass to every customer?"

"No, indeed," answered Kent, resolutely.

"No, sir," added Sam, promptly. "We ain't goin' to furnish whisky free, nor for money, to start with, nor end with, nor any way at all."

"Oh, ho! that's the talk, is it?" responded the man. "Well, I don't care for my own part; if nobody cared for the stuff any more than I do, there'd be a sight less money wasted, but you'll lose custom, I reckon."

Teddy was an interested listener to the conversation, and the next day informed various acquaintances, in his not particularly private or confidential way, that "our new store wouldn't be ketched in any such mean business as sellin' whisky." So the report spread, and a few of that unfortunate class

who persist in viewing their wrongs as among their most valued "rights" took up their old cry:

"Folks needn't try to meddle with other folks' liberties. It's a free country, and we've a right to do as we please; nobody need try to hinder us."

Sam, going down early one morning, found a paper fastened to the warehouse door, containing a few lines rudely scrawled and badly spelled:

"Take notis. We doan't want none of yer cold water stores here—no such ain't needed; mind this, you'll lose if you doan't."

Sam quietly tore the paper down, and the next time he saw Kent showed it to him.

Kent looked troubled.

"I wonder who did it?" he said, examining it carefully. "I didn't suppose people would feel in that way about it."

"They don't—that is, nobody much. Most likely some boys did it. Maybe some of 'em that go to Favisham's a good deal think they don't want another store started, and then again maybe they did it for mischief, just to see whether it would scare us any, or what we would say to it," Sam answered, coolly. "It ain't worth minding."

Kent looked at the paper again.

"They inform us that we had better mind it,

and that we shall lose if we don't," he said, with a faint smile.

"We'll lose the custom of folks when they're after drink, and we don't want that, anyway," Sam replied, "but I don't believe it will stop their coming to us for other things."

Kent went up to talk over the affair with Mrs. Gray. She knew all about the store, its prospects and plans, and was deeply interested in it. She was Kent's chosen and faithful confidante and adviser in most matters, and many were the questions, perplexities and troubles he had carried to that quiet little room. She was inclined to view this subject as Sam had done—some boyish performance that was, probably, more the suggestion of idle mischief than of any settled ill will.

"In any case, I do not see that there is anything for you to do but to pay no attention to it and go straight forward. 'Stand by your honor, your conscience, your faith,' " she said.

Kent looked up with a smile :

"Thank you, aunty, that is a good watchword—

'Stand by your honor, your conscience, your faith,
Stand like a hero, and battle till death.' "

The young firm held long and earnest councils

in regard to laying in their stock of goods—where and how and what they should buy to expend their money to the best advantage. Lists were carefully made out, looked over and reconsidered again and again. Kent had never before known what it was to count so closely cost and means, and Sam had never before had so much money to plan the disposing of, and both worked slowly and thoughtfully. They inquired into prices, informed themselves in regard to salable articles and studied carefully to avoid mistakes and foolish outlays.

The building being ready, Sam devoted several days to making purchases, and evinced no little natural talent for the business. Then, one Saturday morning, Kent went out early to assist in putting things in order. His father, learning his errand, had said, "Take Mike with you, if you like; he may be useful, and he will not be needed here to-day." So Mike, very willing to see for himself "what sort of a shop Master Kint had, onyhow," accompanied him.

They had a busy day in the moving and placing of barrels and hogsheads and the arranging of boxes and jars. Mike's great physical strength and ready good-nature made his assistance valuable, and Teddy was also present, helping and hindering by

turns. The show window was a great attraction to Teddy. He employed himself by placing various articles in it, running out to mark the effect from the outside, and then returning to displace them and substitute something else that might possibly be an improvement. He acquiesced very cheerfully, however, when his arrangement was finally set aside by that of some one else and made himself useful by running of errands. Mrs. Gray saw him passing, and calling him in, sent down a neatly-packed basket of lunch and a tin pail of hot coffee to the workers.

Before dark, the task being nearly accomplished and Mike's aid no longer required, he returned to the city.

"Tell my father that I will come soon—in about an hour, I think," Kent said as he was riding away.

At last all was in order. Teddy had been sent home to supper, the two young proprietors were alone and stood for a few moments surveying their work in silence. They had no large quantity of any one article, neither had they that variety of articles that many groceries contain. Their shelves were by no means crowded, but everything was bright and new and it was theirs, and they looked about

them well pleased, yet with some little feeling of anxiety in regard to the enterprise they were just ready to enter upon.

“Well,” said Sam, drawing a long breath, “it does look nice, don’t it? Success to it!”

A deeper thought was in Kent’s heart; it seemed like cowardice to leave it unspoken, and he said, earnestly:

“May God speed it! He only can.”



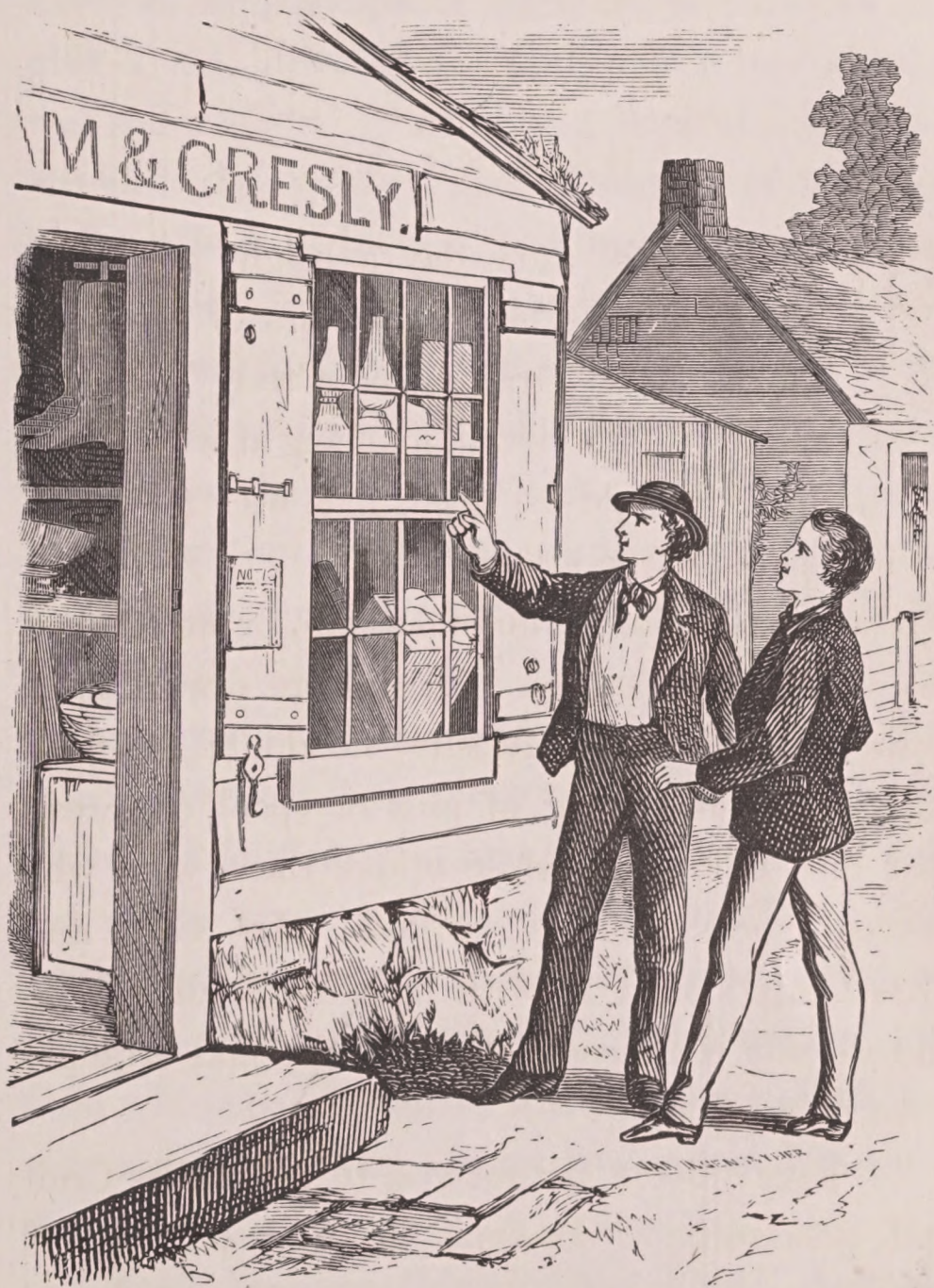
CHAPTER XV.

ONE beautiful June day a bright new sign, admired by at least two pairs of eyes, was hung out—"Graham & Cresly"—and a number of notices, announcing at what hours the new store would be open, had been posted in various parts of the village.

There was quite a run of custom, or at least of customers, the first day. Many were drawn there quite as much from curiosity, no doubt, as from any need of the paper of pins or spool of thread that they purchased, while others there were who proved more profitable visitors. Mrs. Gray and Miss Crail looked in with friendly, cordial faces, and warmly commended the selection and arrangement of goods.

"I have quite a list for you to fill," Miss Crail said, pleasantly. "Hannah has been putting off getting articles for the last week until you should be ready to supply them. A store so near will be a great convenience."

Maggie Nolan came in, blushing and smiling.



The New Firm.

“Shure thin, it’s a fine shop! Two pounds of coffee an’ two pounds of sugar, if ye plase, an’ it’s glad I am, intirely,” she said, rather irrelevantly. But she was glad, grateful and hopeful. She had watched the opening and arranging of the new store with deep interest, looking forward to it as a strong ally in the battle she was waging.

“Talkin’ to a man that’s slipped down in the road an’ layin’ on the broad of his back is all right, but it’s not the same at all as rachin’ out a hand to help him up,” said Tim, significantly, as he ran over in the evening for the “bit of ham” for breakfast.

Kent could not be there at noon, even on that important first day, though his thoughts turned often and anxiously in that direction, but he rode out in the evening to watch and assist for a little while and receive his partner’s assurance that all had gone well. That word of good cheer had just been whispered, however, when a man walked, not very steadily, to the counter, and asked for something to drink.

“Don’t keep anything of the kind,” Sam answered.

“What d’ye pretend to keep store ’tall for?” demanded the man, thickly.

“There’s no pretend about it. We do keep a store, but we don’t keep a rum-shop, and don’t mean to,” Sam replied, rather curtly.

“Where I can’t get my whisky, I won’t buy nothin’,” muttered the stranger, angrily, as he turned away.

“Looks as if he didn’t buy much but that, anyhow,” Sam said, in a low aside to Kent, glancing from the poor fellow’s ragged clothing to his red, bloated face, as he passed out. “He’s a new one—only moved here about two weeks ago, and got a place in the mill. He won’t have it long if he keeps on this way.”

Three or four young men who had been loitering near the door, laughing and talking together in a low tone, now started up, and one of them called out rudely :

“This place is too nice for us ; come, let us go up to Favisham’s, where there’s some fun.”

Kent and Sam glanced at each other, but neither made any comment, and, after all, considering the events of the entire day, Kent went home well satisfied.

“There is no need to ask Kent in what direction he is going for his morning ride,” Mr. Graham used to say, laughingly, in those early days of store-

keeping ; "his horse's head is always turned in one direction." Yet, as his stipulation that studies should not be broken in upon was faithfully observed, he was pleased with an arrangement that gave Kent so much healthful, out-of-door exercise in riding to and fro, while at the same time it would be likely to furnish him valuable lessons in business knowledge and habits and strengthen his judgment and self-reliance. He felt considerable interest in the enterprise too, though he seldom manifested it by asking any questions. He did not wish to give advice or to have the boys consider him as at all concerned in the matter.

Sam Cresly had found in the new scheme occupation that he liked. It was something to think of, hope and plan for, and he went to work with all his energy. It seemed to give him a bit of solid ground to build his bright visions upon, and he looked forward very hopefully. In one way it was much more to him than to his young companion : Kent knew no need of money, but Sam did ; and this appeared an opening into what might yet prove to him steady and profitable employment and enable him to surround those at home with longed-for comforts and advantages. Teddy and Susie, understanding but little about

it, considered the new business quite an advancement. Susie's face was radiant with smiles when she carried a basket to "our store" for anything, and Teddy looked upon "brother Sam" with increased respect—a salutary effect, since it made him more willing to defer to his wishes and opinions. Even Mrs. Cresly, visiting the store, looked about her with a faint, gratified smile on her faded face, and felt something like a glow of motherly pleasure when several spoke to her of what a benefit the store was to the place and of how well Sam was liked.

He was liked. He seemed by a resolute effort to have thrown off the last vestige of half-sullen shyness that once had made him so reticent and kept others at a distance from him, and the result was added self-respect and a pleasant respectfulness of manner toward others. He was kind, obliging and thoroughly honest in his dealings, and as he had proved right in what he had once told Kent—that they could sell some articles at less price than the people had been accustomed to pay for them—the new store became popular with the majority of the denizens of Clannyford.

Kent watched his companion with something of wonder in his pleasure.

"I believe storekeeping is the right place for you, Sam," he said; "you seem to have a natural talent for it."

"Don't know about the talent," Sam answered, smiling, "but I know I like it, and some way it seems to come easier and handier to me every day."

Everything went smoothly for several weeks, and the young merchants had several times congratulated each other upon that pleasant fact, when Kent, going out early one Saturday morning with the intention of spending his weekly holiday in the village, stopped first at the store, as usual, and found Sam with a troubled face.

"What is it? anything the matter?" he asked as soon as they were alone for a moment.

"The matter is somebody's been in here last night. I don't know what to make of it, either, for there ain't anything carried off, as I can see."

He paused, for just then old Hannah came hurrying in.

"I'se most tired out runnin' over; was 'feared you'd done shut up de store 'fore I got here. Corn meal's what I come fur," she said, panting, but smiling good-naturedly, as she handed her pail to Sam. "Clean forgot 'bout wantin' dem corn muffins for supper till jes' a minute or two ago, an' I

don't have no use for corn muffins 'less dey're well raised."

Kent waited anxiously until she was supplied and had taken her departure.

"Well?" he said, quickly, the moment she was gone.

"Well, I found the old shutters at that side window all loose," Sam answered, "and the window had been up. It's plain enough somebody was here and scattered things about considerable and looked into everything, but there ain't anything at all gone, as I can find out, and I can't make out what they were after."

"There was no money here?" said Kent, questioningly.

"No; I don't leave that any time. But they couldn't expect to get much of that, and if they broke in to steal, I don't see why they didn't do it, and if they wasn't after that, what did they come for? that's what seems queer to me. It looks as if they'd spilt a little coal oil, and might have tasted of the salt and sugar and scattered it about some, but they didn't take enough of anything to be missed, anyhow, and I can't make anything out of it," said Sam, with a perplexed face. "Well, I must be off to the mill."

“I will stay a little while and look around,” said Kent, “and see if I can find out anything about it.” Sam hurried away, and Kent closed the door as usual, but remained within to examine the place. He looked about carefully, but could not discover that anything was missing. Then he examined the window that had been mentioned. It evidently had been raised, and there were marks that showed where the shutters had been pried open—not a very difficult task, as they were old and did not close tightly—and there were also marks of feet on the new light paint of the sill. Still, at last, he could only arrive at the conclusion that whoever had entered must have been in pursuit of money, and failing in finding it, had gone away without taking anything. One thing he did decide upon, however—that the old shutters must be replaced by new ones and the building made more secure. They had thought comparatively little about that in their first arrangements, located as they were in a little village that was usually so quiet and orderly that thieving was seldom heard of. But it was time to think of it now, and planning some changes to that effect, he finally locked the door and walked away.

At noon, when the store was again open, he and

Sam talked the matter over for a few moments, but they were presently interrupted by another visit from old Hannah—this time on an errand new to their brief experience.

“I’s brought back dat corn-meal. Why, it’s so strong wid coal ile I can’t do nuffin wid it! Ain’t noways like what we had las’ time,” she said.

“Coal oil?” said Sam, in astonishment. “Why, how can there have been any coal oil about it?”

“Well, dar is,” reaffirmed the old woman, positively. “Jes’ see for yerse’f. Thought I’d come back an’ tell ye ’fore ye sole any more, ’cause ’tain’t fit for folks nohow.”

“It does smell strongly of coal oil, that is certain,” said Kent, who had taken the pail.

Sam came up and examined it.

“It does, that’s a fact,” he admitted, after a moment, “but I don’t see how it came so; the oil ain’t near the meal, anyhow.”

He took Hannah’s pail and went to the barrel from which its contents had been taken. “It’s all alike, anyway,” he said, looking somewhat troubled as he came back, yet speaking pleasantly. “We must get some new, but I don’t see as that will help you to-day.”

“Oh, doin’ widout’s no great hurt; we’ll do well

nuff. I'se sorry yer meal's spiled, though," Hannah answered, speedily forgetting all annoyance of her own in kindly sympathy for others, as her warm heart was wont to do.

She had been gone but a few minutes when a little girl came in—one of Mrs. Clark's merry, healthful brood—her bright eyes opened round and wide with the importance of her message.

"Please, ma says it's queer kind of salt you sent her. It sweetened everything she put it into, and the soup was clear spoiled."

"Sweetened everything! that was odd!" Kent answered. "Sam," in a low tone, "you didn't send sugar instead of salt, did you?"

"No, it ain't likely I did," Sam replied. "I got it out of that barrel."

Kent went to the one he pointed out, and after a moment called Sam to come too. "Taste of that," he said.

Sam complied.

"Salt and sugar together!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, and this in the paper is the same," Kent responded.

"That's what was done last night, then—mixing up things in this way," Sam said, after a minute's silence.

"I suspect you are right," answered Kent, much troubled. "What can we do now?" looking back to where the little girl still stood waiting.

"We can send a little bag of table-salt; they're all right, I guess," Sam replied, and Kent carried one and gave it to the child.

"Yes, I think there is nothing the matter with that, but we don't know what has been meddled with and what has not," he whispered as he went back to his companion. "I don't see any way for us but to taste everything before we sell it."

Sam was lifting out some salt fish for a customer, and looked up with rather a forlorn smile.

"I don't want to taste raw mackerel, but they don't smell of coal oil, and I guess there's no sugar about 'em," he said.

It was a relief to them both when the mill bell rang, and promptly at one o'clock Sam closed the door. They looked into each other's face—troubled faces both were.

"I must stay till I see what all is wrong, if I do lose half a day at the mill," said Sam. "You see how it is, Kent. It wasn't anybody that came to steal at all; they only wanted to spoil things—maybe to hurt us, and maybe it was for what they'd call fun; mean fun, I should say!"

“And just as much harm as stealing, for it has robbed us all the same,” answered Kent, sadly, for he felt anxious and discouraged. “Well, let us go to work and see what they have done.”

The meal was entirely ruined for all culinary purposes: that was soon apparent. A small quantity of the kerosene had been sufficient to impregnate thoroughly the whole barrel. As for the salt, exchanges had been made between that and a barrel of sugar, what was taken from one having been put in the other, so that in neither the quantity should seem diminished, and yet both be unfit for use. In these, however, the work of mischief had not been done so thoroughly, and after removing a considerable quantity from the top of each, the remainder was found to be uninjured.

“It is better than I feared,” Kent said, when they had assured themselves of this last fact.

“Likely they didn’t have time to go clear to the bottom. It’s bad enough, anyhow,” Sam answered, gloomily. Then after a brief pause, in which they both worked on in silence, he said: “Kent, I don’t expect anything like this ever happened to Favisham?”

“No, I suppose not,” Kent replied, wondering a little.

“Yet he ain’t above cheating, sells whisky and makes money any way he can, and we are trying to get along fair and honest, and to help other folks as well as ourselves. Why should this happen to us instead of him if—if God really does care for them that’s trying to do right?” Sam spoke the last sentence somewhat hesitatingly.

“I know he does care; I don’t know why this was allowed to happen,” Kent answered slowly, so suddenly called upon both to exercise and avow his faith; “only I am sure that it is best, however it may look now,” he added, more confidently. “I don’t think that God wants us to do right just because we believe it is the easiest and the surest way of getting along well, but because it is right.”

Sam made no reply, and Kent was thoughtful. He had not said quite what he wished, and it was not easy to put his thoughts into words. Presently a better plan occurred to him.

“Sam,” he said, “will you read the third chapter of Malachi to-night? I mean the last part of it particularly.”

“Well, yes,” Sam answered. The conversation dropped, and they went to looking over the rest of their stock.

A careful examination revealed a barrel of wheat flour also flavored with the kerosene, and some mingling of rice and starch, beans and coffee, but that was all. The boys grew more cheerful after they had discovered the entire extent of the damage.

"We ain't broke up this time, anyway," Sam remarked, at length. "Maybe they thought that because we're only boys we would give up if they bothered us some. Maybe, too, they thought we wouldn't find out what had been done until we'd sold a good deal, and that if folks bought poor things from us once, they'd go to Favisham's next time. But we won't have to stop just yet, and I don't believe anybody'll try this over again."

"We must fix up the place more securely, for one thing, and have new shutters on as soon as possible. We were too careless about that," Kent said.

"Yes, and for another thing, I mean to sleep here for a while," Sam answered.

Kent looked at his companion: the boy of seventeen was only a boy in size or strength. "And what if any one should come in?" he asked, doubtfully.

"Oh, they're not the kind to rob or murder,"

Sam said, understanding his partner's thought. "They would do such a mean, cowardly thing as this and laugh over it, likely, but they wouldn't come in if they knew there was any one here. I don't much believe they'd try it again, anyway, if we just keep quiet and go on as if we paid no attention to it."

"About those things that are spoiled? We must try and replace them," said Kent.

"Yes, we ought to do that as soon as we can. It is a good thing we have some money left."

"Then suppose I ride into town right away and send them out this afternoon, while you are here to attend to them?"

"Well; the flour and corn meal, that is. There is sugar and salt enough to last some time yet, and as for the beans and coffee, Ted and Susie can separate 'em, if it ain't quite so easy as it was to mix 'em. I'll tell you, Kent, that corn meal and flour we have we can sell out cheap to feed chickens with. It ain't likely they'll care if it does taste of coal oil;" and Sam laughed, quite like his cheerful, hopeful self again.

"Perhaps not. I hope it will answer for that; it isn't fit for anything else," Kent replied, and hurried away to mount Lio.

Arriving in town, he purchased the articles agreed upon at once, and having seen them started for Clannyford, he turned his steps homeward feeling neither as blithe nor buoyant as he had done when he went away in the morning.

"You are home earlier than I expected," his father said, looking up at his entrance.

"Yes, sir; I came in to send out some things for the store."

"Ah, that was it." He asked no questions, and Kent, after a moment's thought, decided to say nothing about the occurrences of the day. He did not see that it could do any good, and as, in accepting the position, he had declared himself willing to assume the care, responsibility and trouble it might bring, it did not seem quite fair to burden others with the story of them, especially in cases where it could be no real advantage to do so. Besides, there was a feeling, though perhaps he was scarcely conscious of it, that some mistakes and mishaps would be easier told of by and by, when they should have, if possible, struggled through and retrieved them. A not unnatural feeling it was. Many people can show their scars and speak of them bravely when they can serve as guidance or warning to others, but few can bear to have

even kindly eyes look too closely into a fresh wound.

Sam, busy all the evening, was watchful, too, over those who came and went, but he could discover no clue to the authors of the last night's mischief. He mentioned the subject to no one, and no remarks made to him evinced any knowledge of what had happened. Everything went on as usual. He had decided to sleep in the store, but after closing he went up home for a while. He usually found time still for an hour of study, and this evening he must prepare for the morrow's Bible class. Tired though he was, he remembered his promise to Kent, and turned to the chapter he had asked him to read.

"Ye have said, It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance, and that we have walked mournfully before the Lord of hosts?

"And now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are set up; yea, they that tempt God are even delivered."

It was so exactly his own thought, though in different words, that the boy started.

"It is just about the same question that I asked Kent to-day," he said to himself. "It is queer

how there is something in the Bible to fit everything!"

Then he read on, not *why* the wicked seemed sometimes to prosper, but the solemn assurance, "A book of remembrance was written before him, for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name.

"And they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him.

"Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not."

A feeling of mingled pain and awe stole over the reader. Not here, but afterward, should all things be made equal, not now, but in the day when he makes up his jewels, and though Sam had taken up the complaint that the wicked were set up and they that tempt God even delivered, he did not like to think of that coming day to which he was pointed for an answer. He could dimly understand that such words might have comfort in them for those who really "served the Lord," stilling their questioning and fears, and strengthening faith. But to him, trying to build up for him-

self a sure inheritance here, it was another of the forcible and unwelcome reminders that life could not, would not, be all. Perhaps, too, in the question he had asked, he had been seeking some excuse for stifling conscience, when it urged upon him the claims of a higher, purer service, by the reply that even in the good he had tried to do misfortune had been allowed to come: "It is vain to serve God: and what profit is it that we have kept his ordinance?"

But such words were utterly swept away by that solemn prophecy, "*Then* shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth the Lord and him that serveth him not."

Sam slowly turned the leaves and hid the chapter from his sight, but he could not so easily turn from its memory.



CHAPTER XVI.

AM slept in the store that Saturday night, and many nights thereafter, but his slumbers were undisturbed by any invasion of the premises. Weeks rolled by, and brought Kent's midsummer vacation, the greater portion of which he spent at Clannyford, planning, consulting and working with Sam. A few of the mill people still traded with Favisham, who pretended to feel only a good-natured contempt for what he called "that child's playhouse down in the village."

"It would soon fall through," he said, yet despite his prediction it still flourished and continued to grow in friends and custom. As its young proprietors increased in experience and courage, they increased their stock and introduced new articles that found ready favor.

Mr. Graham visited the establishment one day, his clear, keen, discerning eyes seeming to notice everything, Sam thought, as he furtively watched him. He offered no suggestions, however, and his

few criticisms and comments were so pleasant that the boy's cheek flushed with pleasure.

"Yes, they are doing a good business—for themselves, I hope, and surely for the place," said Mr. Crail, who had accompanied Mr. Graham. "It is a great convenience to the people to have a store here, but it has been a greater benefit still to some of them—your friend, Tim Nolan, Kent, and a few of his class. Do you know I have had no trouble with them lately? They have been working steadily and soberly ever since you started."

Kent looked up with brightening eyes.

"No, I did not know; I only hoped it was so," he answered, feeling that these few words from the usually reticent Mr. Crail were worth a great deal.

There were others, also, to speak words of good cheer and encouragement, and what opposition had at first existed seemed gradually to pass away, and from being an experiment, the store began to take its place in public thought and that of its young proprietors as an established fact. Whether the more secure arrangement of the building and Sam's sleeping watch there had prevented depredations, they could not tell, but they were not again molested, and when, at the close of the first six months, they examined carefully into their profits and losses,

their standing and prospects, they felt that, notwithstanding some mistakes of ignorance and inexperience, they had been successful, and had no cause to doubt the propriety of going forward. One change was made, however. Increased custom made it necessary to keep the store open longer than they had done at first, and an arrangement was effected with Mr. Crail by which Sam was allowed to go to the mill later and leave it earlier.

In the autumn Kent received a letter from Lewis, announcing that it had finally been decided that he should accept the offer of his mother's cousin, Mr. Austin, and accompany him to the Sandwich Islands. Kent answered by going out to the farmhouse for a visit before his cousin should leave home, and the three boys wandered about over the place and walked once more to the lake side—"for the last time in nobody knows how long," Lewis said. He was in high spirits himself, only a little saddened, now and then, by what he could not help seeing of the sadness of others. The look that flitted over his mother's face would call an answering shadow to his own, for he was affectionate and warm hearted and held dear what he was leaving, but his dreams, ambition and eagerness for change and adventure made the future appear so bright

that a thought of it swiftly smiled away his regrets.

Mr. Austin had already paid them a visit and gone on to Hudson to see his daughter. On his return he intended stopping but a day or two, and Lewis was to go with him. Mrs. Mead and Vernie were busy in sewing, packing and making countless loving arrangements for the comfort of the young traveler, yet through it all the mother's heart found ample time for fear and sorrow.

"What mother can keep her boys always with her?" Mr. Mead said, one day, when coming in suddenly he found her with tearful eyes.

"I know," she said. "But Lewis is young and so careless and thoughtless, and the world is full of temptation."

"And is our own home quite out of the world, dear wife?"

"No, but home influence, our watchfulness and care are something. I may be foolishly anxious, perhaps"—she tried to smile—"but life holds so many terrible possibilities."

"And what ever stands between us and their fulfillment but His great love who pitieth those that fear him 'even as a father pitieth his children'?"

"I know," she answered, again, "and if Lewis were only a Christian—" She paused.

"Ah, Hetty! what mother's love can make her child that? Trust him, here or there, to the One who can. He is only going from our sight, not from our prayers, our faith or our God," her husband answered.

Lewis did not share or understand any such fears, and even Jasper was inclined to think that by far the darkest side of the picture was turned toward those who remained, inasmuch as they should have nothing new to interest them—"nothing but the old life and old work, only lonelier," he said. It would certainly be lonelier for him. He had never been separated from his brother, and notwithstanding some diversities of taste, they had been constant companions, sleeping or waking, in the orchard, field or attic workshop. The parting was harder than either of them had thought when the day for it really came. But Lewis whistled the same tune over and over again, and hurried about, doing various things that there was no particular need of his doing, while Jasper tried to find a safe expression for his feelings in expending his nicest printing upon the card that was to go on Lewis' trunk. At last the packing was all over,

the good-byes said and the trunks locked and taken away, leaving to the room that peculiar desolate look that a room will always wear after such leave-taking. The mother stole away to her own chamber. She was beginning to realize in these last few days that her children were fast becoming children no longer; she felt like questioning sadly, with another mother—

“Where, oh where, are my little ones gone?”

Even Tildy, who had always viewed boys as very questionable comforts, and had serious doubts as to their mission being of any great value, wiped her eyes with her apron as she picked up the various articles that had been scattered about, and finally observed,

“A racket is bad enough, to be sure, but I do believe too much stillness is worse—so there! I wouldn’t mind if there was some law against breaking up families any such way.”

Vernie laughed through her tears at that proposition.

“Just think what kind of a world that would make, Tildy!” she said.

“Don’t know about the world,” answered Tildy, looking at the matter only as it affected herself,

“but I know ’twould have made it a sight pleasanter here to-night. Well, since he’s gone, I hope he’ll have a good time and be comfortable among the Sandwiches.”

Kent tarried a day or two longer, and then left them for home, “being too much a man of business to make long visits now,” Jasper remarked, mischievously. And, indeed, Kent’s life had been so busy of late that he did not feel quite content to remain long away from his accustomed pursuits and interests. He had received one letter from Sam while at his uncle’s, containing some little items of intelligence and the assurance that everything was going well. Sam did not write badly. He had, with practice and care, acquired a firm, smooth hand, and tolerably correct orthography, while grammatically he wrote much better than he talked, Kent thought. It was a fact not difficult to account for, since in talking, though he had improved by study and reading, he yet used, without thinking or noticing, many of the old pronunciations and arrangements of words to which he had been accustomed from childhood. But writing came less naturally ; it required more thought and care, and in it he adopted more the language with which he had grown familiar in books.

Keeping the store open more hours each day proved a benefit to Sam in a way that he had not anticipated. Customers, no longer restricted to so short a time in which to make purchases, did not crowd in so rapidly, and he found himself in possession of intervals of leisure that he soon learned to improve by having some book lying near where he could take it up. He could now indulge in the luxury of buying a book occasionally, though he did not do it often; he had a feeling that such outlay would be selfish while so many things were still needed in his home. That home and its inmates, however, showed already many tokens of the brighter days that had come to them. The place began to wear a comfortable, homelike air, and its occupants were growing more into a family in respect, attention and thought for each other.

They were beginning to hold quite a different position in the village, too. People had pitied "old Cresly's family" in their poor, forlorn condition, ragged and dirty—they had only pitied, not respected, them. But Sam's steady, persevering industry, and his untiring efforts to support his mother and the children honestly and respectably, had won sincere sympathy and respect. He had

grown into favor and esteem, too, since he had been in the store, and the family, neatly and comfortably dressed, were no longer regarded as they once had been. Mrs. Cresly, going down to the store one day in pretty print dress and white collar, and meeting one and another of the village people there, began dimly to understand that "young Cresly's mother" was not considered altogether the same as the drunkard's wife had been—that, indeed, there was no excuse for her being quite what that poor woman had been. If she was treated with more respect, it was probably because she and her family appeared more respectably, and having gained some comprehension of that fact, she strove to awaken to more interest and activity. Very skillful in planning or efficient in execution she never would be, but her doing her best added not a little to the comfort of the household.

Teddy and Susie went regularly to school, Teddy not very fond of it yet, but less rebellious on the subject than he had been at first. He had become quite useful in the store. His talent for acquainting himself with all his surroundings had enabled him to become readily familiar with the various articles, their place and prices, and he soon learned the art of tying up a parcel neatly and rapidly, so

that Sam was often glad of his help when there were many in. Teddy was therefore able to gratify his taste for storekeeping frequently, and, as he took care to impress upon Susie, it was some real good—"selling things honest; not getting away folks' money for worse'n nothing, and sending 'em home drunk to abuse everybody, like it would have been at Favisham's."

So, comfortable, and with brightening hopes and prospects, the winter found them—a winter freighted with rich blessings to many, and never to be forgotten.

The Sabbath-school, begun in weakness, had been growing and strengthening. Nearly all the village children had been gathered into it. The Bible class had enlarged, also, and the corps of teachers had increased, not so much in numbers, but in energy, efficiency and love for their work as they gained in experience. But as the winter fell, there seemed to be a deeper interest manifested by both teachers and pupils—more intense earnestness in those who spoke and those who listened. Eyes that were wont to wander grew eagerly attentive, and the usual calm utterances of prayer from one lip and another began to grow broken and tremulous. Questions of sacred history, geog-

raphy and disputed points of doctrine gave way before the all-absorbing story of redemption—the star, the cross, the riven tomb. Ararat, Pisgah and Carmel, with all their interest, grew dim before Mount Calvary, and to any one who took up another topic, anxious hearts could scarce refrain from saying, like those of old, “Sir, we would see Jesus.”

The same feeling was manifest in the other Sabbath services of the village. In the city churches there was a great awakening—in many of them a solemn, glorious harvest of souls—and still the influence deepened and extended. More than one Christian heart in Clannyford, hearing at a distance the glad cry, “Jesus of Nazareth passeth by,” had been pleading earnestly that even here, also, his dear presence might come.

The city pastors, busy though they were, had a common interest in this little corner of the vineyard, and they could not neglect it. They arranged that each in turn should give to it an evening, and so meetings were appointed in the little school-house for every evening in the week. The people thronged there, earnest and attentive, and an impressive silence marked the gathering, as if the listeners would fain catch every word and the Holy

Spirit had breathed a solemn hush upon all restlessness and trifling. Many eyes were tearful, many voices choked with emotion. Pale, sad faces changed to joyous, radiant ones in those weeks. Some hearts, aching and troubled, resisted, struggled and questioned still; some hearts, burdened beyond all bearing, found Him who only could say, "Go in peace; thy sins are forgiven thee." Night after night promises, invocations and warnings were repeated, urged and explained, fervent prayers were offered and hymns sweet, though often tremulous, were sung.

Evening after evening Sam Cresly was in his place drinking in every word. He scarcely knew why he had gone at first, but after that he could not stay away. The question he had for months been trying to turn from or put aside came back now with redoubled power, and spoke in a voice that would be heard—the old, old question: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" Nothing! nothing! He knew and felt it now, and his share of the world, its ambitions and hopes he would gladly have given if so he could have purchased salvation. But he could not; he had learned that. It was no longer a question of what he would give up or what he

would keep. He had seen himself a sinner, lost, undone, and day by day the sore, troubled, anguished soul felt its weight of guilt more and more oppressive. Sadder and sadder his face grew. Even the mother, not usually observant, noticed his deep dejection—noticed that his books were laid aside, and that he no longer took them up when he came in, but sat, with his head bowed upon his hands, silent and thoughtful.

“What is the matter, Sammy?” she asked.
“What ails you?”

“Nothing,” he answered, and then, as conscience whispered, “Dare you call your sin, your soul’s peril, nothing?” he added: “I mean, nothing that you can help.”

Faithfully he went through with his accustomed round of duties. His labor in the mill he was so familiar with that it scarcely required any thought, but his employment in the store, calling for care and attention, was more irksome. Scrupulously he fulfilled its demands, but he had lost his pleasure in it. Days when there were many customers and rapid sales brought no glow of satisfaction now—none of the buoyant feeling of hopefulness that he had been wont to know. “What shall it profit?” seemed written on everything.

We will not try to follow him through all the mazes of doubt, struggle and questioning in which he wandered: what pen so skilled that it can trace through every intricate winding, down to its very depths, the working of an immortal soul? Whether the faith within us has been of such slow and gradual growth that we ourselves cannot tell when we first began to believe and to love, or whether the transition from the old life to the new has been marked by a sharp, dividing line, there lies in it still a mystery: "The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth; so is every one that is born of the Spirit." And only God can know every step of the way by which any one of his children became alive in Christ.

Sam felt, in those painful days, that his soul stood alone before its Maker. The people about him seemed far off; they could not come near or bring help or comfort. He felt himself in dreary solitude, desolate, lonely, helpless, until his eyes were at last opened to behold One at his side who was waiting, willing, mighty to save—One who "hath borne our sins and carried our sorrows." Then, with a joy that cannot be uttered, he comprehended the truth—

“Everything was fully done

Ages long ago ;

Jesus died and paid it all—

All the debt I owe.”

Doubt, cloud and darkness vanished, a new light came to his eye, a clear, glad tone to his voice.

“Sounds as if he could hardly help singin’,” his mother murmured to herself, watching him and wondering, and yet vaguely guessing something of what this change must mean—a change so apparent in many ways that she could not but notice it.

Energetic and earnest Sam was in other things, and the same characteristics marked his entrance upon a new life and service. He looked upon the dear ones in his home—far dearer now than they had ever been before—and longed to have them also belong to the Master. Since his father’s death, young though he was, he had been virtually the head of the household, and now, as the days went by, he became more and more desirous that his home should be a Christian home. It must at least have its family altar, and though it required an effort to propose this, he did propose it.

“Mother,” he said, one evening, “it don’t seem right to live the way we do ; I feel as if it wasn’t.

Wouldn't you be willing we should read a chapter and have a prayer every night and morning?"

"Why, Sammy, I hain't no objections," she answered, slowly, yet with some surprise stealing into her mild voice.

"Shall we begin to-night?"

"Yes, if you want to, Sammy."

Teddy thrust his hands into his pockets, turned around and looked at his brother, and Susie opened her eyes to their widest extent. But when Sam seated himself by the table and opened the Bible, they also sat down and listened quietly while he read the words of that grateful, trustful Psalm—

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me, bless his holy name.

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits ;

"Who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases ;

"Who redeemeth thy life from destruction ; who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies."

When he closed the book and knelt, they, after a moment's hesitation, followed his example. It was a short and very simple prayer, and the voice that offered it was not quite steady, but it was fer-

vent, and even the children understood it—understood that Sam was praying for them. They arose with a certain feeling of awe mingled with their wondering that forbade their expressing any curiosity or asking any questions. The mother was equally silent. She had wiped some tears away during the reading and the prayer, but she made no remark upon the subject afterward, and, indeed, did not seem inclined to talk about anything.

After a time the children went away to bed, and the mother and son were left sitting by the fire alone. Sam, watching her face, fancied that it wore a troubled look. He wished she would speak, but she did not; she only sat quietly gazing into the fire, apparently watching the flashing, dancing blaze. He had something to say to her, however, and might not find a more favorable opportunity than this; so, after waiting in vain for her to open any conversation, he said :

“Did you know it’ll be communion in Dr. Roy’s church two weeks from next Sunday?”

“No, I didn’t know; is it?” she answered, rather absently.

“Yes; he told me so. And, mother, that’s the time that any one who wants to join the church has a chance to do it. There’s been a good many

taken into all the churches lately—likely there'll be a good many this time—but, anyway, I mean to be one."

She looked at him—a look that he did not quite understand. Opposition was not to be expected from her in any case, but he began to fear that she felt some dislike to his taking the step he had proposed. His old habits of reticence still made it not easy for him to speak freely where he felt deeply, but he tried to make something like an explanation :

"When we know God has made us, takes care of us and gives us everything, and that Christ died for us, it seems only right that we should try to live for him and be willing folks should know we mean to—"

He paused, for his mother suddenly leaned her head upon her hands and burst into tears.

"What is it, mother?" he asked, surprised and troubled. "You don't want me not to do it?"

"No, no, I ain't like that," she sobbed. "But oh, Sammy! I'm all alone now. You've gone away and left me behind."

Sam's perplexity deepened; he did not know what to answer, for he scarcely understood her meaning. She herself could not well have ex-

plained it. She had been learning to lean upon and trust in him more and more of late; she had awakened to some faint feeling of motherly pride in him. But this evening the reading and the prayer had made her feel that, in some way, they were far apart. She realized that he had changed, and that the life upon which he had entered was different from hers. It almost seemed that he had gone out of her world, and the new sense of distance and separation came with a sharp pang.

"Go with me, then, mother," he said, at last, not knowing what else to say.

She looked at him, the tears standing in her faded eyes:

"Oh, I can't! I don't know how to! You're goin' to be a Christian and try to live right, and some way I don't know nothin' about it. I've had a hard life, Sammy, all these years, and seen a good many troubles, and it don't seem as if there was much of me left that God would care anything about. I ain't good, anyway."

"He does care. He knows we ain't any of us good, and he don't wait for that; if he did I don't know what would become of me," said Sam, earnestly. "It's just that Jesus loved us and died for us and wants to save us. He only asks us to trust

him, and then try to live for him as well as we can; he don't ask anything more or better than that."

The mother listened almost as a child might have done. They talked long, and as she talked and questioned she grew gradually calmer and more comforted. Through her son's words a higher voice than his spoke to her, and from that evening her feeble, uncertain steps began to turn heavenward.

Through these weeks, Kent Graham had been watching with untold anxiety the one who was dearest of all on earth to him. Should so many be pressing into the kingdom and his father still remain without? While so many hearts were troubled or rejoicing, could his be quite unmoved? Mr. Graham had usually been a regular attendant at church, and he went now, with Kent, to many of the evening meetings. Was he altogether indifferent to it all? Kent wondered, stealing often a glance toward the grave, attentive face beside him and trying to read its expression. The air of quiet, respectful attention was always the same, but the services once over, he scarcely ever made any remark or comment upon them, and day by day Kent waited, prayed and hoped for some evidence

of more than his common interest, some manifestation of feeling.

Self-contained and reserved Mr. Graham always was. He could converse frankly and genially upon ordinary topics, but of anything that concerned himself alone, his own feelings, he scarcely ever spoke. Of his wife, so dearly loved and so deeply mourned, he rarely uttered a word, even to those who had also loved her, and Kent could not remember that, after the first few weeks of bereavement, his father had ever mentioned to him the one who was so dear to them both. Yet even then, young as he was, he had divined something of how far that silence was removed from forgetfulness, and he questioned now if hours like these would not bring up afresh the memory of that deathbed, and give new power to the beloved one's dying plea.

As the days went by his heart grew sad with disappointed hope. One day Dr. Williston dropped in, as he often did, and in the course of conversation made some light remark about the unusual number of meetings that were held and the reason for it. Mr. Graham checked him, almost sternly.

"No sneers in that direction, Williston, if you expect me to talk with you. There are things that

are sacred, whatever you may think of them ; treat them with reverence or let them alone."

The doctor elevated his eyebrows and looked at him a little curiously, as though he would like to ask some pointed questions, but he desisted, and dropped the subject. Kent, at a little distance, watched the two for a moment, and then, as the conversation changed to some commonplace theme, turned away with a sigh. It was only his father's fine sense of justice and propriety that had spoken, he thought.

Weeks passed, and even Dr. Williston seemed to have lost all inclination to speak of such subjects with levity. The power that was working on every side was too mighty to be discredited or denied, its influence so widely spread that even the most careless and reckless could not doubt its existence.

"Kent," said Sam, one morning, when his friend had come out to Clannyford, "Jesus is our King ; I am going to town next Sunday to take the oath of allegiance."

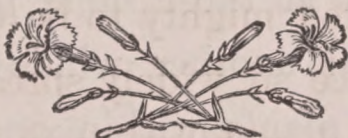
Kent grasped his hand warmly.

"Sworn into his service. Yes, that is it," he said, thoughtfully. "I am very glad of it, Sam."

He was glad. He had himself been numbered

with God's people for nearly a year now, and he could understand and sympathize with the feeling that shone in his companion's eyes, yet he thought, as he rode away,

“Such a flood-tide of grace, and that one dear, noble heart all untouched! How can it be?”



CHAPTER XVII.

THE winter snow was lying white and cold over Clannyford. Mrs. Gray's flower-beds were only white mounds and ridges now, no flower or shrub lifting its head without, and only the few plants in her little parlor holding a bright remembrance of the vanished summer-time.

Mrs. Gray sat in a large easy-chair by her window looking out at those same pure drifts, while Vernie Mead, at another window, was watering the blossoming plants within and clipping away the dead leaves. Paler, thinner and more feeble Mrs. Gray had grown this winter—scarcely able to be out at all since the early fall. Mrs. Mead had paid her a visit—the first for a number of years—and finding her old friend's health so poor, had, upon her return home, sent Vernie to stay with her for a time.

“I really do not think that I am sick enough to need nursing and taking care of, dear, though I

am very glad to have you here," Mrs. Gray said when she welcomed the young girl.

Vernie thought differently as she looked at her and noticed how frail she had grown, and Miss Crail, who ran in for a little while on the evening of Vernie's arrival, found a chance to say to her, aside,

"I am very glad you came. I have felt for some time that she ought not to be left alone."

It was to Mrs. Gray, as she had said, very pleasant to have Vernie there. The bright, girlish presence, the light step and the clear voice cheered and enlivened her hours of weakness and weariness; her sympathy with and love for young people had always been strong, and she enjoyed this companionship now. But that she also needed her young friend's assistance and care she soon learned, for the first intensely cold weather seemed to prostrate her small remaining strength at once and make her thoroughly an invalid no longer able to leave her room.

A kind, tender, faithful nurse Vernie was. Her fifteen years of life had given her no great experience, certainly, but the qualifications that fit one for attendance in the sick-room are more natural than acquired, and Vernie had a firm,

light step, a quick, observant eye and skillful fingers that seemed to know when and how to arrange the pillows and shade the light. She had had some advantages in being an only daughter, too. She had been her mother's constant companion, and so grown more womanly and thoughtful than she might otherwise have been, and Mrs. Gray, ill though she was, suffered from no severe pain that made active remedies and ceaseless watching necessary.

This freedom from intense suffering deceived Vernie's inexperience, and day by day she expected some sign of returning health. There were slight fluctuations in the disease—the patient weaker to-day, a little better to-morrow, then weaker again—but the young nurse waited in vain for any permanent sign of returning strength. She wondered at it.

Mrs. Gray looked up from the pillows of her sofa with a smile:

“I suppose it means, dear, that my journey is nearly ended. I did not understand at first, but I think I do now.”

“Oh no, not that!” Vernie answered, quickly. It came so suddenly, this thought that had not once crossed her mind before.

"Why not?" Mrs. Gray asked, still smiling. "Not because my life has been so short, surely? The way I have come must seem long to you, looking forward."

Vernie glanced at the pale face and silvering hair. Seventy years! it did seem long.

"Yes," she answered, frankly.

"I know; it did to me once. When I had come rather more than half the way, the rest of the journey looked long—oh, so terribly long!—to me. I was left alone then, Vernie; those that were dearest to me had all been taken. I thought of the many years of life that might lie before me, and they looked so long and dreary—just a lonely desert, it seemed to me then. But they have not been so; God has filled them full. There has been call enough for hope and fear, interest, sympathy and friendship, to keep my heart warm and in fellowship with the human world about me." She lay quietly for a few moments, then added, musingly, "There is a depth of meaning that many people do not think of in the promise, 'Those that trust in Him shall never be desolate.'"

A day or two after this conversation Mr. Graham came out.

"I wish you would see Dr. Williston, Aunt

Gray," he said, thoughtfully, finding that she was no better.

"I scarcely think it will do any good, but I am willing to see him if you wish, Robert," she answered, and Mr. Graham went back to the city and brought out the doctor that same afternoon.

The medical gentleman examined into the case carefully, as was his wont, but he said very little. He prescribed but little either in the way of remedies—a simple tonic and something that might relieve, in a measure, the troublesome cough. His patient felt that his judgment coincided with hers in regard to her condition.

"What do you think of her?" Mr. Graham asked him as the two drove away together.

"I think that she is right in her opinion—she will never rally. It is possible, though not probable, that she may live until spring, but the changing weather then would almost certainly prove fatal," the doctor replied.

After a moment's pause he said, thoughtfully, "Graham, whatever I may have said, or may believe about some things, do you know I am always glad to find any patient of mine a Christian?—such a one as she is? That seems an odd thing for me to say, doesn't it? But they are more likely to be

quiet and untroubled, and improve faster where there is a chance for recovery, and where there is none, why, I tell you it is a hard thing to see any one going down to death, struggling, resisting, holding back all the way, begging of you to save him when there is nothing on earth that can be done. I have seen such things more than once. But this Mrs. Gray, now—she has a firm faith that whatever lies before her is brighter than anything she is leaving behind.”

“Yes, she has firm faith,” Mr. Graham answered, with some emotion in his voice. “Doctor, I have seen more than one such deathbed, and it is not easy to doubt the brightness of heaven when you have seen the glory of the gates through which such as these pass.”

Vernie, who had watched anxiously through the doctor’s visit to have him speak some assuring word of hope, seated herself, after he had gone, and wrote to her mother an account of the invalid’s state, and it was agreed upon that her intended visit of three or four weeks should be prolonged indefinitely.

The sick-room was by no means lonely, for the sufferer liked still to see those whom she had been accustomed to seeing. Maggie Nolan came often,

her bright face no longer clouded by a home sorrow, for, as she expressed it, Tim was "steady as a clock these days." Her warm heart bore in remembrance the time of her first coming to Clannyford and Mrs. Gray's kindness to her then—her advice in planting the "bit of a garden," her assistance and teaching in cutting out and making clothing for the children, and, more than all, her unselfish, faithful care and help when little Mitty had been stricken down with fever. "It's an ignorant bit of a young crayther I was, not knowin' at all what to do but for her tellin' me." And though she had greatly increased in housekeeping lore, and had needed little of such assistance for the last three or four years, yet past favors were not forgotten, nor her olden esteem and friendship lessened. Now that Mrs. Gray was ill, she slipped away often from her home work and little ones to spend a few minutes there.

Little Susie Cresly stopped frequently to inquire after the invalid, and Mrs. Cresly came now and then, quiet and timid, saying but little after she had come, but showing her good-will by coming. Miss Crail devoted a great portion of her time to her friend. Mr. Graham came out often, taking care that the invalid had every comfort, and anx-

ious to gratify any wish that she might express, and Kent was there daily.

"I do not feel at all like a lonely old woman who has nothing to bind her to earth, and yet that is what I once thought I should be when this time came," she said to Miss Crail one day.

"No; there are those who love you here as well as there, and it is bright for you either way. But what shall I do without you?" Miss Crail answered.

Tenderly the wasted, tremulous hand was laid upon hers:

"Trust your God with that, my dear. If your truest happiness, your best good, needs anything to fill my place—any new interest or friendship—be sure it will be sent you. God leaves no empty places that are not better so."

"But sometimes it seems as if my heart has not a place in it that is not either a wound or a scar," Miss Crail said, sadly, for these days of going with her friend down to the river side brought back vividly the memory of other sorrows.

"I know what that feeling is," Mrs. Gray answered. "It does not last always, nor even long, and looking back on any one of all those trials, I

doubt not you will find interwoven with it the traces of a Saviour's love—some lesson learned, some comfort given or new hope gained that would make you not willing to undo it if you could, and be quite what you were before: 'He knoweth best who knoweth all.' "

"True," Miss Crail said, thoughtfully, though the tears still clung to her lashes; "we are sure to see that afterward, sooner or later. But at first—"

"Ah! at first," interrupted Mrs. Gray, with a faint smile. "Do you know I was thinking, to-day, how very much happier life would be if we were content to take our sorrows no faster than God sends them to us, and not carry such a burden of fears for many things that never befall? Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide."

The short winter days made no tarrying, and each one of them seemed to take something from the invalid's strength, yet they were quiet, peaceful days and the sick-room a sunny, cheerful place. To it friends carried their little items of intelligence, their plans and hopes, sure that now, as always, they would excite sympathy and interest. The Sabbath-school, the Bible-class, the store and their growth and prospects were still talked of

and cared for there, and projects for their benefit formed and discussed.

Kent, one afternoon, brought a letter from Jasper and read it, partly for Aunt Gray's benefit, and partly for Vernie's, for notwithstanding her own frequent letters from home, nothing from there could be uninteresting to Vernie. It contained some pictures of how the winter was passing, what work and pleasures it was bringing to the inmates of the old farmhouse, some account of books and studies, and then Jasper wrote:

"Do you remember how, two or three years ago, we used to talk over what we would do and be when we grew older? I have decided now, Kent: I want to be a minister. I always thought it was a noble, useful calling, but I never used to feel about it as I do this winter. I am thinking about it in all my studying now. I wrote to Lewis about it, and he sent me back word to 'go ahead, and he guessed by the time I was ready to go to college he should be able to help me if I wanted any help.' That was just like Lewis, wasn't it?—so kind-hearted and generous. He is doing very well there, and Mr. Austin likes him."

"Dear Lew! Yes, that is just like him!" Vernie said, affectionately.

“Jasper a minister of the gospel!” Mrs. Gray said, musingly. “The last time I saw him he was only a little boy—a quiet, thoughtful little fellow—and I have never thought of him as anything else, though I might, when Lewis is old enough to be away in business and Vernie has grown into my faithful nurse. The children are not children any longer. I used to think Jasper very like his Uncle George,” she added, slowly, after a moment’s pause. “I hope he will preach as faithfully and well, but I shall not be here to see it.”

There was, or Miss Crail fancied there was, a faint touch of sadness in the last sentence. She bent over her friend’s pillow, and said, softly,

“*Thine* eyes shall see the King in his beauty; they shall behold the land that is very far off.”

A bright smile lighted up the invalid’s pale face.

“Yes, and that will be far better than the sight of any earthly good—the King, *my* King, in his beauty.”

Christmas came and passed with its sweetly tender associations and rejoicings. Mrs. Gray had talked and planned and even assisted slightly in the preparing of various little gifts for the Sabbath-school scholars, but she had overtaxed her feeble strength in doing so, and suffered from reaction afterward.

Mr. Graham and Kent, going out the day after, found her much worse—not suffering much pain, but weak and exhausted. Her face showed it so plainly that there was no need for making inquiry, Mr. Graham thought, as he sat beside her.

She welcomed them, as she always did, then glanced at Vernie.

“Go and lie down, dear,” she said. “Your uncle or Kent will stay with me for an hour, while you rest. I was wakeful last night, and Vernie is so careful of me that she cannot sleep if she thinks I do not.”

She spoke feebly, and as Vernie left the room closed her eyes wearily and lay quite still for a time. Mr. Graham hoped she was falling asleep, and remained motionless lest he should disturb her, watching her face with a growing conviction that her weary days and wakeful nights would soon be over. Suddenly her eyes unclosed and met his. She read something of his thought, and smiled.

“Almost home now, and a Saviour’s love is brightening and gladdening every step of the way. Oh, Robert, dear Robert, if you but knew this precious faith! When will you be his?”

“Now,” he answered, quietly, yet so distinctly

that Kent, standing by the window, heard the word plainly, and started.

“Father!” burst from his lips.

His father turned his head slightly, and met his anxious, questioning, eager look with a smile, and yet with moistening eyes, then answered again,

“Now, Aunt Gray. I have been seeking him for weeks, or, rather, God’s great love and mercy have sought me, and I trust have drawn me to himself. I know myself a sinner, and Christ my only Saviour. There are long, wasted years in the past—years that I cannot undo—but I want to be his now and always, if he will accept me, and I dare not, do not, doubt his willingness.”

Mrs. Gray clasped the speaker’s hand with her slender, trembling fingers, but for a moment she was silent.

“I was thinking, just for an instant,” she said, “what tidings these would be to carry up to heaven. But the rejoicing angels knew it first.”

She could talk but little, and Kent’s heart was too full for words. He stood at the window watching the falling snow-flakes, but every heart-throb was a glad thanksgiving. A happy hour that was, though it passed almost silently. There was no feeling of constraint or want of sympathy in the

silence; it was but the quietness that in a new, holy joy is so welcome.

Vernie came back after a time. No one had noticed how long she had been absent until she had excused herself for having allowed her one hour to become two.

"But I was sleeping so soundly that I didn't waken until a few minutes ago. I hope I haven't kept you waiting when you wanted to go, Uncle Robert?" she said.

"No, I have been in no hurry to go," he answered, smiling. But as he glanced at the window and saw how the storm was increasing, he arose. "I had better not wait any longer, though. Kent stays to-night, I believe."

Kent followed him to the door and stood there with him for a moment.

"You had better stay, I think," his father said. "It is possible they may need you, and in such a storm it would not be easy for them to send for any one."

Kent assented, and they clasped hands for an instant with a warm, close, fervent pressure that expressed more than they could readily have told in words, then Mr. Graham hurried away.

Just at dark Miss Crail came in. She had come

to spend the night, but the fast-falling snow kept all others away, and the little group gathered about the fire for a quiet evening. They had become well acquainted during the last few weeks. Vernie had grown familiar with the village, its inhabitants and interests, and the flow of conversation was cheerful and easy, Mrs. Gray's faint voice joining in it now and then as she lay supported by her pillows. At last she said :

“Sing something.”

They sang hymn after hymn, and she lay smiling and listening, but with closed eyes.

“Now that new Sabbath-school hymn that you were teaching to some of the children the other day, Vernie—‘Stand up for Jesus.’”

As the simple, earnest battle-cry of the chorus,

“Stand up, stand up for Jesus,

For Jesus and his cross !

Lift high the royal banner,

It must not suffer loss,”

died away, she said :

“I feel, these last days, as if I wanted to give that charge to every one. You are all the pledged followers of the Master, dear friends ; never forget, never be faithless. In the light or in the darkness, work, work ; be anything, everything, for his sake.

The utmost you can do will seem very little in an hour like this. He has done so much for us."

The faint voice grew lower still; even the slight effort of speaking so much had wearied her. She closed her eyes again, and presently seemed to fall into a light slumber. They carefully shaded the light from her face, and busied themselves very quietly with their books and work lest they should disturb her. More than an hour passed without her awakening, and Miss Crail went to her side and bent over her for a moment.

"She is breathing easily and naturally, and appears to be sleeping quite comfortably," she said, in a low voice, as she came back to the fire. "I do not think that she is any worse than she has been through the day, and it is so late that we had all better try to rest. Kent needs it after his long ride through the cold, and, Vernie, you must go to your own room to-night and sleep as soundly and comfortably as you can, for you have been kept awake so much lately. I will lie here on the sofa, and I can call either of you in a moment if you should be needed, so do not hesitate to go."

Vernie demurred a little at leaving her friend alone, but her objections were speedily overruled, and they separated for the night. Vernie was

tired, but as she placed the lamp upon the little stand in her room and turned to draw the curtains at the window, she paused for a moment with her face pressed close against the pane and looked out. The snow lay piled up white on the window-sill and covered all the ground, but it had ceased falling and the moon was dimly beginning to show.

“As these white robes are soiled and dark

To yonder shining ground,

As this pale taper’s glimmering spark

To yonder argent round,

So shows my soul before the Lamb,

My spirit before thee ;

So in my earthly house I am

To what I hope to be.”

The lines came to Vernie’s thought as she looked. She felt such a longing to be purer, better, truer. The days in the sick-room had not been useless ones to her—indeed, no experience that God sends to his children is useless—and these had made her see something of how life would seem in retrospect, and what death might be made. She had heard this evening, too, of the words her uncle Graham had spoken, and to her grateful heart this precious faith shared by yet another dear one grew more precious and glorious still. She longed to be more

earnest and faithful, not only to know the power and safety of holiness, but that her whole life might also show forth the "beauty of holiness." And how could a soul weak, impatient and sinful as hers be sufficient for these things? She could but lift it to Him in whose keeping it was, and pray that He who was the Author would also be the Finisher of her faith.

The rooms below were quiet, and her head once fairly nestled upon its pillow, she was soon sleeping. But "at midnight a cry was made, Behold the Bridegroom cometh!"

Nay, *had* come, for when Kent and Vernie, summoned by Miss Crail, hastened to the bedside of the sufferer, they found a sufferer no longer — the spirit had passed without a pang or struggle.

Lonely the house seemed the next morning—more lonely still afterward—but the associations connected with it were not, could not be, gloomy. Miss Crail, going from it to her own home, realized of how much she had been bereaved, how much she must miss that had been very dear to her; yet she felt strengthened for the life before her, for work and for warfare—more anxious to do all in her power, that no scheme of usefulness commenced

should fail or suffer because there was one worker less.

Kent, too, missed his old friend sorely. She had taken, in part, a mother's place, and had been more to him than he ever knew until he could no longer seek her loving counsel and sympathy. To her he had carried many doubts, questions and troubled thoughts that now must be borne alone, save as he learned more and more to carry them all to her Saviour and his. And just here this sorrow bore rich fruitage to Kent, in that it taught him to look less to any disciple, however beloved, and more to the Master. It is not ill for any of us to have many things that we share with Jesus only, and when we lean too heavily upon any human friendship, we are almost certainly severed from it that our strength may be not from earth, but from heaven.

Vernie remained for a few days at her uncle Graham's, and then went home, carrying good tidings of two pilgrims—the one who had just entered through the wicket gate, and the other who had crossed the river and passed into the celestial city.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A YEAR has passed over Clannyford, all its hours doing their work on the place and its people, chiseling, altering, building, overturning—work not always plainly discernible at first, but standing out more and more clearly as the hours grow into days and the days into months.

Kent, who has been away upon a six months' tour with his father, is quick to notice changes upon his return. The addition of a new room to the factory has been completed, and some more machinery and workmen engaged, so that the village has grown larger by several families.

“And what sort of people are they, Sam?—these new ones?” Kent asked of his friend as they stood together in the store.

“Mostly quiet, orderly, respectable people, I believe,” Sam replied, “at least so far as I have seen anything of them, and I see almost every one, you know.”

The store has prospered and its business increased

so much that Sam finds constant employment there, and has given up his place in the mill. He has made arrangements too, since Mr. Graham and Kent have returned, by which he is to purchase his partner's interest. The terms offered him have, of course, been easy and liberal, and he expects, in the course of a year or two, to have the business his own. The entire control, all planning and executing, have, indeed, been his for the past six months, and as Kent is soon to enter upon a course of medical study, the establishment is already virtually Sam's.

"You do not need to work for a living," he said, half playfully, when Kent told him his intention of becoming a physician.

"Working is my living," Kent answered, more seriously, "and if I need not be very particular about my fees, so much the better; I can give more of my practice to the poor, who will need it most."

Kent is thoroughly gratified by his companion's success. It seems to him that Sam has changed and improved rapidly, even during the few months he has been absent. He has grown more manly and self-possessed, and is so thoroughly, nobly in earnest about everything that he undertakes. That he has won the confidence and respect of others

is evident from the way in which they speak to him and of him.

“I think Clannyford is better than it used to be in a number of ways,” Sam said, coming back to Kent’s side, from which he had been called by a customer. “Oh, Kent, there is one thing I believe I didn’t write to you about. We have started a temperance society here, and a good many of the mill hands have joined. Ted and some of the other boys have been carrying pledges about, and they have succeeded very well in getting signers, young and old. Ted seems to consider himself bound to the temperance cause ever since a stranger gave him a quarter for a certain lecture up at Favisham’s.” A smile flitted over Sam’s face at the memory.

“I’m glad of it,” said Kent, heartily—“glad about the society. I was thinking of some such plan while I was away, and wondering how it would answer. I heard Gough one evening, and that first gave me the idea, I believe.”

“I wish we could have Gough here for once,” said Sam, musingly. “Our little schoolhouse meetings can’t afford to look as high as that, though, but I think we ought to have some lectures here this winter. There’s been some talk about it, but nothing done yet; I’m glad you’re back, on that account.

Do you know, Kent, when folks have decided that a thing is good and right to be done, I can't see any use in waiting to talk it threadbare before they make a move?"

Kent laughed.

"It isn't your way," he said. "When you believe anything ought to be done, you believe it all over, but there are some people who seem able to believe with their tongues a long time before their hands are convinced. But about these lectures: I should think it could easily be managed. There are several very good speakers in our own city, without going any farther."

"One good thing about it," Sam remarked, "is that it would be a pleasant way of passing some of the winter evenings. A good many of the men would like it for that. They don't know what to do with themselves after they're off from the mill, and it would be some use to them that way, besides the lecture itself."

"That reminds me," said Kent, "of something father was speaking about a few days ago—procuring a good library for the use of the village, so that whoever chose could take books from it."

Sam's eyes brightened. He had not lost his love of books—it had deepened and strengthened, rather

—and he had studied still more carefully and faithfully since the motives that actuated him had grown purer and higher. His interest was awakened at once, and the two were soon deep in a discussion of books, rapidly remembering one after another that would be “just the thing.”

“That’s a plan worth thinking about,” said Sam, enthusiastically. “It would please a great many, too, for there are very few that care about wandering off to the station and spending their evenings talking and drinking to what there used to be. It seems to me the whole place has grown more quiet and steady than it was a few years ago.”

“I think so too,” Kent answered, “and Mr. Crail has noticed it. He told father that he had had a more orderly, faithful, steady set of workmen for the last year and a half than had ever been in the mill before. He thinks two things have had a great deal to do with it—this store, for one, because it has furnished no liquor, and yet has kept such a good variety of groceries, and at such reasonable and honest prices, that the people have traded here almost entirely, and the other has been the steady running of the mill—no stopping that could in any way be avoided. He says the employés have appeared to take more interest in the place

and feel more that it is home, because they have a prospect of constant employment here."

"And there is something else that has helped to make a change, too," Sam added. "Since your father had those notices, 'No swearing allowed,' put up in every room, there has been very little of it heard there to what there once was. One of the men was speaking to me about it the other day. He had got into a way of swearing a great deal, and no mill that he had ever worked in before had tried to hinder it. When he first saw that rule, he thought it was a queer one and over-particular. But still he didn't want to lose a good place for a habit that was no benefit to him, so he tried to be very careful when Mr. Crail or any of the overseers were around, and having to watch so much of the time had broken him of swearing altogether. I don't know that he thinks much about it as a sin, but he says it is 'foolish and not respectable,' and he's 'glad to get cured of it.'"

"I must tell father that," said Kent. "I think he will be at Mr. Crail's this evening, Sam; suppose you come over, and we will have a talk about the lectures and see what can be done. Miss Crail will be interested in getting them up, I am sure."

"What lectures?" asked Teddy, who had just come in from school and deposited his books upon a soap-box.

"We haven't decided what ones yet," Sam answered, laughing. "There comes Mrs. Clark, Ted; go and wait on her, won't you?"

Teddy hurried behind the counter with a most business-like—

"Syrup? Yes, ma'am, we have it, and the very best kind too."

He went to draw it for her, and Mrs. Clark glanced over at Sam.

"Did you bring any letters for me this afternoon?"

"No," he answered. "The Western mail had been delayed, though, so there may be something in the morning."

"You are not village postmaster as well as store-keeper?" asked Kent, when she had gone.

"Not exactly, but I'm a sort of mail-carrier, and express agent, too. There are generally a number of letters to post and to inquire for, and various parcels to fetch and carry, whenever I go into town. I go regularly, you know, and have the use of a horse and wagon from the mill, so it's convenient for any one that wants to send."

"And not quite so convenient for you," Kent replied. "I think you are getting your hands full of work."

"I don't mind that so long as it helps any one," Sam said.

As Kent looked at him there flashed across his mind a quick thought of the contrast this frank face, genial tone and unselfish heart and hand, so ready to help others, presented in many ways to the boy, Sam Cresly. Scarcely pausing to consider, he said something of the kind :

"I was thinking of how many things there are for you to do, and yet it is but little over four years since that night when you said you were 'nothing to nobody.'"

Kent spoke playfully, and Sam smiled at the old words. Still, it was a half-sad smile, as memory swept back over those dark days and recalled the sullen hopelessness, the bitterness and fierce pride that had filled his heart.

"I know," he said, slowly ; "I felt just so then. But now"—a quick light came to his eyes and a sudden earnestness to his tones—"oh, Kent ! I would be all things to all men, if so I might win any to Christ. What was it you were reading the other day ?—

“No pride of place thy service hath,
No room for me and mine;
Our human strength is weakness, death
Our life, apart from thine.

“Apart from thee all gain is loss,
All labor vainly done;
The solemn shadow of thy cross
Is better than the sun.’”

There was a moment's silence, and then Susie's bright face looked in at the door. She paused for a moment, half shyly, at sight of Kent, then advanced to her brother's side:

“Ma sent me to see if you couldn't come up to supper earlier to-night. She wants to go over to Mrs. Sharp's a little while, 'cause Willie's sick.”

“Yes, you can go, Sam,” said Teddy, with the air of a proprietor giving liberty to a clerk. “I'll 'tend the store till you come back.”

Sam laughed, but availed himself of the offer, which had, indeed, some self-sacrifice in it, since Teddy was just from school, with a hungry school-boy's appetite, and usually had his own supper first and relieved his brother afterward.

Susie, well pleased that the matter had been so easily arranged to suit her mother's convenience, slipped her hand into Sam's for the homeward

walk, and Kent accompanied them as far as the gate—a new gate, for the old, tumble-down fence had given place to a neat paling within the last year. The house had been freshly painted, too, and a pretty little portico built over the front door. Sam had been anxious to make these improvements as soon as he felt able to do so, and as he had done the work himself whenever he could find time, the expense had been but trifling.

They lingered a moment for a parting word concerning the evening's engagement, and then Kent passed on to meet his father at Mr. Crail's and to speak to him of the subject they had been considering.

Mr. Graham was interested in it at once. The villagers of Clannyford were not now to him so much "the mill-hands" as "my people." It was so that he thought of them oftenest, and he felt in no small measure responsible for their welfare. Any plan to benefit them was sure of his consideration. Miss Crail, too, warmly approved of the new society, and entered heartily into this project; so the matter was pretty nearly settled at the tea-table, where it was thoroughly discussed, even Mr. Crail taking part in it by making some valuable suggestions.

Mr. Crail has changed somewhat in the last two years. More kind and considerate he has grown, more charitable toward the weaknesses of others—perhaps more conscious of his own. He is more ready to help on any good work, and since that one winter when so many hearts were stirred, so many led from darkness to light, no sneering or careless word concerning the reality or power of the religion of the Bible has ever crossed his lips. His sister's loving eyes, always so watchful, have been quick to notice it. It is not the great change for which she waits and longs, yet she does accept it as a token of hope, and prays for him with a faith that does not fail.

The influence of that winter of grace is felt in Clannyford in many ways. The Sabbath-school, so small in its beginning, has grown greatly in strength and influence, and has many warm friends where it once met, if not hostility, at least indifference. The Bible class has increased in numbers and interest, and from its ranks will doubtless come more earnest workers to strengthen the hands of those who from the first have been toiling so patiently and lovingly.

Still the work goes on, and the kingdom of God, that "cometh not with observation," extends and

enlarges, though growing silently, even like the beautiful temple of old wherein was heard "no sound of hammer, or axe, or tool of iron." Here and there, in great things and little things, not always knowing what are great or what are small, faithful laborers are working, each in his appointed place, but all, everywhere, for His sake "in whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord."

THE END.

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